ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

WOOLWICH POLYTECHNIC
JUNIOR TECHNICAL SCHOOL FOR BOYS

Engineering Trades

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ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

FOURTH SERIES

Selected by J. W. MARRIOTT

LONDON: GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
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FOREWORD

THERE is no need to offer any apology in publishing a fourth series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*. The three preceding volumes have been received with an enthusiasm which exceeded the most sanguine expectations, and the greatest appreciation has been shown by teachers of English in schools, colleges, and evening institutes, by amateur actors, and by other serious students of modern drama.

The Editor's ambitions have not changed: he wishes to give the public a handful of really good plays, and these must be left to justify their inclusion. Certain critics complained because there were no translations of foreign plays, but these are, for the present, deliberately omitted.

"Reading in contemporary literature," observes an American educationist, "is about the only kind of reading in which students can make explorations and discoveries of their own. What chance has a boy or girl to form opinions of the classics, coming to him, as they do, with all the prestige of famous names and annotated editions, be-praised by the teacher and be-Baedekered by generations of critics? . . . No opinion or judgment is worth anything educationally except one's own."

This argument applies to drama as pertinently as it applies to fiction or poetry. The only way, it seems, in which one can form an independent judgment of plays is to study a dozen different kinds of play—to place them alongside one another, to compare methods of treatment,

to sort out impressions. It would be useful as well as amusing to include one specimen of a really bad play—without comment. Some time, perhaps, the experiment may be tried—but not with this volume. And, after all, bad plays are easily accessible, although one frequently has to stand in order to see them.

J. W. M.

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The authors or their representatives and Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., for "The Prince who was a Piper" (from *Plays for the Meadow and Plays for the Lawn*), "Square Pegs," "The Man in the Bowler Hat," "The Betrayal," "The Patchwork Quilt" (from *Cinderella Married and Other One-Act Plays*), "Five Birds in a Cage," and "The Poacher"; the author and Messrs G. P. Putnam's Sons, Ltd., for "The Flight of the Queen," from *Plays of Near and Far*; the author and Mr Basil Blackwell for "St Simeon Stylites"; the author and Messrs Hendersons for "Paddly Pools"; the author's representative and Mr Martin Secker for "The Constant Lover."

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THE PRINCE WHO WAS A PIPER

By Harold Brighouse

CHARACTERS

The King
Prince Denis
Jègu, *the Lord Chancellor*
Bernéz, *equerry to Denis*
A Sentry
Princess Maie
Lizina, *the governess*
Téphany, *the maid-in-waiting*
Marzinne, *a peasant-girl*
Heléne, *a shoemaker's daughter*
Three Peasant Girls
Dancers

No writer of one-act plays has received more attention from the editors of anthologies than has Mr Harold Brighouse. In England and America "Lonesome-like" has appeared in four anthologies, "Followers" in three, "The Price of Coal" and "How the Weather is Made" each in two, while single appearances have been made by "Maid of France," "When Did They Meet Again?" "Little Red Shoes," and "The Night of Mr H." The play which follows has not appeared in any other English anthology.

It is a delightful play for performing in the open air. The theme has the happy inevitability of a fairy-story, and although there are no fairies (in the conventional use of the word), there is a sense of enchantment—a dream-world where "beauty's king and art is law."

Mr Brighouse made his fame with plays about life in the grim industrial towns and colliery districts; yet his characters were real flesh and blood, and there were flashes of beauty that were profoundly moving. When he chooses, as here, a sort of magic garden he still insists on having real people, real emotions; the setting alone is different. He writes in prose instead of in verse; but he attains poetry all the same.

THE PRINCE WHO WAS A PIPER[1]

The scene is the palace garden, and if the garden bears some resemblance to a bit of Versailles so much the better. If there are a few statues, so much the better. But these things do not really matter, because grass is green, and all that is essential by way of stage-setting is the pedestal of a statue on which there is no statue, and a long seat.

The play is of no period, but that of Watteau might be aimed at in the costumes. Enter the KING, JÈGU, *his Chancellor, and* LIZINA, *his daughter's governess. They come down to seat. The* KING *sits, fanning himself.*

KING. What is the use of telling me to keep my temper when I've lost it? Jègu, you're expert in history. Was ever a king and a father in such a dilemma before?

JÈGU. The history of royal families is rubricated with high-spirited daughters, your Majesty.

KING. Only of royal families, Jègu? I have a suspicion—mind you, it is only a suspicion—that disobedient children are not a monopoly of royalty.

JÈGU. I would say that the debonair vivacity of her Highness, Princess Maie, is exclusively a royal prerogative, sire.

KING. I find that almost comforting. I shouldn't like

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street. Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

to think that the mere populace had daughters who tried to defy their fathers. Kings have privileges after all.

JÈGU. Undoubtedly, sire.

KING. And Chancellors have duties, Jègu. The chief of your duties is to advise me, and you do not advise. What am I to do with a daughter who insists on seeing the Prince I have chosen as a husband before she'll say whether she will marry him or not?

JÈGU. It is without precedent, sire.

KING. You just said high spirits were quite usual in royal girls. So they are. And in royal boys too. I myself——

JÈGU. Ah!

KING. Yes. You remember very well. I can sympathize now with what my father felt about me. But this is weakness. Girls are different. Lizina, you've had charge of the Princess.

LIZINA. Yes, your Majesty.

KING. Well, if she isn't perfect whose fault is it? Is there any reason why I shouldn't clap you in a dungeon for rats to feed on?

LIZINA. Spare me, sire.

KING. Then bring Maie to her senses. [*Rising*] I wash my hands of it. I only say that it's chains and a dungeon for both of you if that marriage does not take place this afternoon. The Prince is reported ten miles away; he may arrive at any minute, and if the Princess isn't in her wedding-dress and passionately willing to marry him the moment he comes, I foresee both of you enjoying such a future as it chills my blood to contemplate.

LIZINA. Sire, the Princess has the strong, imperious will natural to a daughter of yours. She——

KING. The affair is now in your hands. Authority is only worth having when it can be delegated. I delegate

mine to you two. Let us speak of other things to soothe me. Tell me, Jègu, is my crown on straight? When I am angry, it is apt to slip.

JÈGU. Your crown, sire?

KING. Yes. Don't tell me it never slips. I dislike flattery.

JÈGU. Your Majesty is not wearing your crown.

KING. What? [*Puts up hands to head.*] Now, let this be a warning to you, Jègu. And you too, Lizina. You can judge from this how disturbed I am. Forgotten my crown, on a State occasion! Of course, I shall throw my first and second valets into chains, but it won't give me real satisfaction.

[*As he turns to go the* PRINCESS MAIE *and her chief maid,* TÉPHANY, *enter.*

KING. Not in your wedding-dress yet?

MAIE. Wedding-dresses are for weddings. I will be wooed before I am won.

KING [*to* LIZINA]. And you are supposed to have instructed her in Court etiquette!

MAIE. Oh, she did. That is why I insist on seeing the Prince before I consent to marry him.

KING. You have seen his portrait. He had it specially painted.

MAIE. My good Lizina instructed me so well in State affairs that I suspect that portrait. No artist dare be honest when he paints the portrait of a prince.

KING. Your governess is a disgustingly cynical old woman. I have fifty portraits of myself—I am painted each year on my birthday. Every portrait is exactly like me at the period at which it is painted. I should hang the artists if they weren't absolutely veracious, and the fact that I have never hanged an artist is proof of their veracity.

MAIE. Yet I will see Prince Denis before I give my promise.

KING. I hate this modern scepticism. In my day we believed our parents. Well, I've put your affair in the hands of Jègu and Lizina. If you're obstinate, they'll both be gnawed by the sharpest-toothed rats in the darkest dungeon. I've a couple of valets to condemn now, and I hope you'll see reason by the time I come back. [*Going*] Jègu! Is everything wrong to-day, small things as well as big?

JÈGU. Your Majesty?

KING. Look at that pedestal! Where's the statue that used to be on it?

JÈGU. I will ask the chief gardener, sire.

KING. More delegated authority, eh?

JÈGU. The pedestal shall have its statue before you return, sire.

KING. That's better. See that it has. I'm a reasonable monarch, Jègu. I don't ask for daffodils in August, but what's the Prince to think of us if he sees a pedestal in the royal garden without a statue? It's like a throne without a king, or a king without—— [*Puts hand to head.*] Yes, indeed, the rats shall have those valets. [*Exit* KING.

LIZINA. May I sit down, your Highness? I feel faint.

JÈGU. I confess to a similar weakness. If I might sit, your Highness?

MAIE. Of course.

[LIZINA *and* JÈGU *sit at opposite ends of the seat;* MAIE *is behind it, leaning over the centre of its back.*

JÈGU. It is excessively disconcerting to be threatened with the dungeon rats at my age.

LIZINA. Or even at mine.

MAIE. Father often threatens, but he always has second thoughts.

JÈGU. Yes, your Highness, but the second thoughts are sometimes a long way after the first. He once had second

thoughts about hanging a man some hours after the gentleman had been buried.

LIZINA [*groaning*]. Oh!

JÈGU. I myself composed in Latin an epitaph for the unfortunate youth. Its grammar was correct and its taste was unexceptionable, but I never felt it adequately met the case.

LIZINA. There was a duchess at a Court ball who turned her back on the King. He ordered her to cut her hair off, and then countermanded the order when the barber had already obeyed it. I never felt that a royal warrant to wear a wig was complete compensation, though the warrant *was* published in the *Court Gazette*.

JÈGU. If we are half devoured by rats before his second thought comes I don't think our surviving halves will ever be beautiful again.

MAIE. Téphany!

[TÉPHANY *comes to her, and presently leans over the seat like* MAIE.

Téphany, if you wanted to persuade me that this is my wedding-day would you talk about hangings and rats?

JÈGU. Oh, your Highness, I will be cheerful. I will.

LIZINA. We will. [*They look most doleful.*

JÈGU. We are.

MAIE. You aren't, but you might make a diplomatic pretence of it. Now, listen. I am not going to marry a prince whom I've not seen. Instead of sitting there moping, don't you think you might be taking steps to enable me to see him!

LIZINA. But etiquette——

MAIE. But rats, Lizina.

JÈGU. I am inclined to abrogate etiquette on this occasion. It seems to me that where the choice is between etiquette and rats——

MAIE. Then why don't you go and do something about it, Jègu?

JÈGU. I will.

MAIE. Mind, I don't promise to marry the Prince. If he's like his portrait, I may, or I may not. But certainly I won't meet him for the first time in church.

LIZINA. It's usual, your Highness. It's the royal custom in these parts.

MAIE. Yes. Only the world progresses when people do the unusual. I will be made love to before I marry.

LIZINA. But after marriage there is no obstacle.

MAIE. No. That's why it would be dull.

JÈGU. Come with me, Lizina. I have an idea. Perhaps we can arrange for the Princess to see Prince Denis.

LIZINA. It will be dangerous.

JÈGU. So are rats. [*Exeunt* LIZINA *and* JÈGU.

MAIE. That's all right. Now they've gone, Téphany, you've to help me to see the Prince.

TÉPHANY. I? But I thought the sage Jègu said he had an idea.

MAIE. He's far too frightened of dungeons to have an intelligent idea. Mine is intelligent. Listen. Sooner or later the Prince will come into this garden. Father's sure to want to show off his gardens. You heard how annoyed he was because that statue wasn't on its pedestal.

TÉPHANY. Yes. His Majesty instructed Jègu to have it replaced.

MAIE. And Jègu has forgotten. He's thinking of himself. But I've not forgotten.

TÉPHANY. No. Shall I call the gardener to you?

MAIE. Don't be stupid, Téphany. I am the statue.

TÉPHANY. You!

MAIE. Yes. When they come back there will be a statue on that pedestal, and each of them will think the

other gave orders to have it put there. I shall be the statue, and I shall see the Prince.

TÉPHANY. You'll have to keep very rigid.

MAIE. To be rigid, to stand for hours at receptions in statuesque immobility, is part of the training of a princess. And I can spin round when nobody is looking.

TÉPHANY. But your dress, your Highness?

MAIE. Now, my good Téphany, don't make difficulties. All sensible statues wear Greek costume. Don't tell me the royal wardrobe is beyond providing me with a Greek dress.

TÉPHANY. Your Highness has a noted complexion.

MAIE. Yes; it's natural, too. But are cosmetics beyond the resources of the palace?

TÉPHANY. No.

MAIE. No. Ask any dowager.

TÉPHANY. But if I ask they will ask me why I want them, and——

MAIE. Pooh! You can manage it all.

TÉPHANY. Yes, I can. But——

MAIE. I'll hear no more objections.

TÉPHANY. I was only going to say that the mere populace are to be admitted to the royal gardens to-day. If they come near the statue——

MAIE. But what joy! I've never been near the mere populace. They're only a noise to me—cheering and waving handkerchiefs whenever I drive in the streets. I'd love to know what they are like when they're not cheering. They can't live cheering. It would overstrain their lungs.

TÉPHANY. Yes, but——

MAIE. That is quite enough, Téphany. Come and make me into a Greek goddess, and don't knit your brows like that or I shall dislike you exceedingly.

[*She says this as she goes.* TÉPHANY, *with a despairing gesture, follows her out.*

[*From another side* JÈGU *enters, followed by* LIZINA. *As he walks he snatches in the air as if trying to catch something with his hand.* LIZINA *watches him, puzzled.*

LIZINA. Is it a fly? In the royal garden?

JÈGU. A fly! [*With a gesture to heaven*] The deficiency of a woman's mind! The scantiness of the female intellect! [*Resuming his snatching.*]

LIZINA. I know flies are not allowed in the royal garden. I know there are signs up to say trespassers will be prosecuted. But if it is not a fly, what is it?

JÈGU. My idea. My elusive, fugitive, magnificent idea for bringing about a meeting of the Prince and the Princess. I had it, and now it has gone. [*He sits, brooding, on the seat.*]

[LIZINA *stands looking at him.*

LIZINA. Yes. You display all the symptoms of a massive masculine intellect.

JÈGU. Silence, woman. I'm thinking.

[*A* SENTRY, *with spear, enters. He halts before* JÈGU, *and salutes with spear. There is no response. He repeats the salute.*

LIZINA. I don't think it's any use your doing that. The Chancellor is sunk in thought.

SENTRY. He looks unhappy. But the Captain of the Guard has sent me for orders, and I must get them. My lord! My lord!

JÈGU. Eh?

SENTRY. My lord, the populace are pressing for admittance to the royal garden.

JÈGU. It is early.

SENTRY. My captain bids me say that in his opinion it would be discreet to admit them now.

JÈGU. I never knew a populace yet that didn't want an ell when you give it an inch. However, this is no day for

severity. Admit them, and let them know that they are admitted at this hour owing to the gracious condescension of the Lord Chancellor.

SENTRY. They shall be told. [*Salutes and turns.*]

JÈGU. And—you—fellow—try to keep them away from this part of the garden. Don't use force. Use tact. If a few stray this way, no matter; but keep this as private as you can. [SENTRY *salutes and goes.*

LIZINA. Have you got your idea?

JÈGU. Got it! How can I think amongst obfuscating interruptions?

LIZINA. Perhaps I, though only a woman, can help to clarify your thoughts. The problem is to cause the Prince to meet the Princess. As a first thought, where is the Prince? Ought he not to be here by now?

JÈGU. Yes. But I have not been notified of his arrival. Therefore he has not arrived.

LIZINA. You're sure that follows?

JÈGU. An arrival which is not notified is not an arrival. The Prince would have no legal existence at this Court.

LIZINA. Then the Prince is not here. And neither is the Princess.

JÈGU. Eh?

LIZINA. Where is she? The difficulties of bringing together two people are enormously increased when you don't know where either of them is. Presumably, the Princess was to await our return here. She has not waited. She is not here.

JÈGU. No. You're quite right. That had not occurred to me.

LIZINA. It's so necessary to catch your hare before you cook it.

JÈGU. That is a disrespectful reference to her Highness.

LIZINA. I've often referred to her more disrespectfully

than that. I'm her governess. But shall we find out where she is? If you're going to bring the Prince to her it will be useful to know where to bring him.

JÈGU. You're making me very anxious. The impulses of royalty are really most disconcerting.

[PRINCE DENIS, *with his equerry*, BERNÉZ, *enters. The* PRINCE *is dressed as a piper, except that he has forgotten to change his shoes, which are glittering.*

LIZINA. Hush! The populace approaches.

JÈGU. Let us go and find the Princess. They must not see that we are anxious. Ha, my good men, you take the air to-day in the royal garden.

DENIS [*breathing hard*]. It does taste different from country air.

JÈGU. This is royal air, my man. [*Going*] The simplicity of him! [*Exeunt* JÈGU *and* LIZINA.

DENIS. Well, Bernéz, that's good enough. The Lord Chancellor didn't recognize me in these clothes.

BERNÉZ. No, your Highness.

DENIS. Hush! Don't call me that here. I'm a piper.

BERNÉZ. If your High——, if you say so.

DENIS. If you don't believe me, I'll pipe. [*Puts pipe to mouth.*]

BERNÉZ [*hastily*]. Oh, I do believe!

DENIS. You're an extraordinarily candid friend, Bernéz. Other people tell me my piping is magical enough to bring lifeless things to life, but you——

BERNÉZ. I have said so too. Just now I am concerned with other things, with your insistence upon this masquerade, your curious plan to see the Princess before you marry her, and——

DENIS. I don't see anything curious about that, but that isn't the whole of my plan. In fact, that isn't my plan at all. I put it to you that way in order to persuade you

to get me these clothes of a wandering minstrel, but now, my dear Bernéz, now I have the clothes, I *am* a wandering minstrel.

BERNÉZ. But——

DENIS. And I shall behave as such. Do you realize that for the first time in my life I am free from the faithful eyes who watch lest I do anything unbefitting of a prince? For the first time I am free to mingle with the people. I have the chance to put my piping to the test. Is it as wonderful as courtiers tell me, or is it of no better quality than any wandering minstrel's? To-day I shall discover that. And to-day I may discover much more than that.

BERNÉZ. I pray you will be moderate.

DENIS. Minstrels are never moderate. They live in a halcyon world, where beauty's king and art is law. A stern law, Bernéz, to which free men freely bow in self-surrender. A joyous law that bids a man work hard and bids him love his work.

BERNÉZ. Oh, so long as it is only work you love you can love as immoderately as you like!

DENIS. Oh, but it isn't! Beauty is king of minstrels, Bernéz, and beauty is queen.

BERNÉZ. Queen?

DENIS. Have you no pity for a poor prince sent here to love at the word of command? To love a princess he has never seen? When I do see her she'll be so veiled and crowned and hidden behind a dress stiff with its own embroidery that there'll be no guessing what she's like, what even her outside is like, let alone the soul of her.

BERNÉZ. You were born what you are.

DENIS. Yes, prince by the accident of birth, but greater than prince by the gift of Fate—or so they say. They say I am a notable musician. They say. That's the point,

my courtier. That's what I'll never learn at Court—the truth. If indeed I am an artist, then I shall claim the artist's right, the free man's right to love a lass, to choose and not be chosen for, and I am here where I shall learn the truth.

BERNÉZ. But I assure you—— Oh, this is dreadful! Truth is so dangerous.

DENIS. Only for cowards. Only, perhaps, for princes. If I am an artist I do not fear the truth.

BERNÉZ. You are here to marry the Princess, your Highness. It is a sacred obligation.

DENIS. An obligation on the Prince. But if I am proved an artist I renounce my princedom for a higher title. I become a minstrel and a man, and no princess would marry me. No princess, but under the stars somewhere will be a ragged piper lying by a camp-fire with a girl-wife, and happiness will go with them along the highways of the world because they love.

BERNÉZ. I shall certainly be hanged for this.

DENIS. Your rank entitles you to the privilege of being beheaded.

BERNÉZ. I feel a melancholy satisfaction at that thought, but the most distinguished execution won't console me for dying in a thoroughly bad cause.

DENIS. You shan't die, Bernéz. I officially dismiss you from my service. In fact, you were officially dismissed yesterday, consequently the King, my father, cannot hold you responsible for anything that happens to-day. Of course, if I continue to be a prince I cancel the dismissal. Meanwhile, you are my friend.

BERNÉZ. This is very considerate, your High——

DENIS. My name is Peronnik. As my friend, you ought to know my name. I'm a piper. You always had a taste for low associates. [*There is a scream off.*

What's that?

[*Two girls,* MARZINNE *and* HELÉNE, *enter, running from the* SENTRY, *who threatens with his spear.*

DENIS. What on earth are you doing?

SENTRY. What are you, if it comes to that? Every idle vagabond in the country is loafing about the royal garden to-day. Be off.

MARZINNE. But we are admitted to the garden to-day.

SENTRY. I have orders from the Lord Chancellor to keep this part as private as possible.

DENIS. Yes. I should like it private for a while. [*Eyeing the girls.*]

SENTRY. Be off, when I tell you, the lot of you. [*Threatens with his spear.*]

DENIS. Ah! An opportunity. I'll conjure away his harshness. [*Puts pipe to lips and plays it.*]

[*The girls watch the* SENTRY, *who begins to laugh.*

DENIS. Wait! Wait! My music is magical. It is! It is! [*Pipes again.*]

[*The* SENTRY *is approaching him threateningly.* BERNÉZ *goes to* SENTRY, *puts hand on his shoulder and a coin in his hand, gesturing him to humour* DENIS *and to go.*

[SENTRY *looks at coin, finds that it is gold, salutes* BERNÉZ, *and goes. As he goes he bites the coin, and* DENIS, *turning, sees it. He ceases piping, disgustedly.*

DENIS. Oh!

BERNÉZ. But what's the matter? He's gone.

DENIS. Yes, and I saw him bite the magic that sent him as he went. Your magic, not mine. Old habit's strong in you, Bernéz. You shouldn't have done it.

MARZINNE. Oh, but your music is beautiful, piper.

DENIS. Is it? Do you really think so?

[*A number of girls and boys enter. They say: "The piper." "We heard music." "Music."*

MARZINNE. All music is beautiful.

DENIS [*disappointed*]. Oh!

HELÉNE. See how they are gathering at the sound of it. Play, piper, play again.

[DENIS *pipes a dance tune. The girls and boys perform a country dance.*

BERNÉZ. You got them dancing at any rate. You can't say I had anything to do with that.

DENIS [*ceasing to pipe*]. No. But it is easy to set people dancing when that is what they want. I need more proof than this. [*He goes off sadly,* BERNÉZ *following.*

MARZINNE. Don't stop piping. Piper, do play! Oh, he's gone!

HELÉNE. Here, we'll go too. After him! After him!

[*They all go out after the piper.*

[*During the dance* TÉPHANY *has appeared once or twice, as if to see if the coast is clear, and she gestures to* MAIE, *who is off, not to come. Now she appears again, watches the dancers go, and then beckons* MAIE *to come. Enter* MAIE, *dressed as a Greek goddess, barefooted or sandalled, with the flesh-tints whitened out of her face, and hair powdered.*

[*From behind comes the sound of the pipe playing a dance tune.*

MAIE. Have they all gone?

TÉPHANY. Yes. I expect they will come back, though.

MAIE. That's what I want. I want to be amongst the populace. I want to know how they behave when they don't know they are under royal eyes. I want to know how they make love.

TÉPHANY. I shouldn't think they will dare to make love while I am here.

MAIE. But you won't be here.

TÉPHANY. It is my duty to attend you.

MAIE. Yes. That's why you won't do it. Where you are every one expects me to be. If you're here it's a signal that I am not far away, and they will discover me. So you won't be here.

TÉPHANY. But I can't be anywhere else. If they find me without you they will question me, and——

MAIE. Yes, of course. That won't do. You always blush when you lie. You'll have to be nowhere. You'll have to hide.

TÉPHANY. Within call of you, please.

MAIE. Your sense of duty is very strong. Well, hide in that bush over there. It's very thick, and it isn't prickly. Now, help me on to the pedestal. [TÉPHANY *helps her up.*] That? [*She poses.*] No. I don't think I could hold my arms up for long. That? That's better. I shall relax when nobody is here. You may go, Téphany.

TÉPHANY. Some one is coming now.

[MAIE *poses.* TÉPHANY *runs off. The piping ceases.* DENIS *enters, followed by the* GIRLS *who danced.* MARZINNE *is amongst them, and so is the* SENTRY, *now without his spear.* MARZINNE *hangs on his arm.*

DENIS. Oh, but I can't be always piping. Give me time to get my breath again.

FIRST GIRL. But you pipe so wonderfully.

DENIS. You really feel that?

FIRST GIRL. Of course. You have such a handsome face.

DENIS. Oh! And does that make me a good musician?

FIRST GIRL. Nobody would notice false notes however many *you* played. [DENIS *turns unhappily away.*

SECOND GIRL. I think your piping is delightful.

DENIS. Would you if I were ugly?

SECOND GIRL. Yes. Won't you play again?

DENIS. Perhaps. Soon.

THIRD GIRL. Most pipers do other things to amuse us besides piping. They tell stories, they turn somersaults, they sing.

DENIS. I have none of those arts.

THIRD GIRL. Oh, dear! I think I shall go and look for the Prince. They say he must come soon.

SECOND GIRL. It's queer that he hasn't arrived.

FIRST GIRL. Would you be in a hurry to marry a princess you'd never seen?

SECOND GIRL. But the Princess is very beautiful.

THIRD GIRL. Not bad, for a princess. I'm not sure that she'd shine if she'd plain clothes on. I'm rather sorry for the Prince.

DENIS. Are you?

THIRD GIRL. Yes. Shall we go and look for him? A piper who can only pipe, and loses his breath as quickly as you do, is not very amusing.

[DENIS *sits despondently on seat.*

FIRST GIRL. Yes. Let's go.

[*The* GIRLS *exeunt, except* MARZINNE. *The* SENTRY *stays with her.*

SENTRY. Shall we go?

MARZINNE. It seems ungrateful to the piper.

SENTRY. Oh, he must be used to more kicks than ha'pence. A dog's life, believe me.

MARZINNE [*leaving the* SENTRY, *going to* DENIS]. Piper!

DENIS. Oh! I thought you'd all gone.

MARZINNE. I didn't, because I want to thank you for your playing. [*Holds out hand.*]

DENIS [*rising and taking it*]. You're very kind.

MARZINNE. Kind to offer thanks! Bare thanks!

SENTRY. Pooh! There's a coin for the fellow. That's the way we soldiers are, my girl. Free with our money. Here, you, take it. [*Offers coin to* DENIS.]

DENIS. I did not pipe for money.

SENTRY. Oh? As you like. Come, Marzinne.

MARZINNE. I think I will stay here.

SENTRY. There's nothing to do here.

MARZINNE. The piper may play again.

DENIS. Indeed I will. And for you only.

SENTRY. Indeed you won't. For her only! I'm not musical myself, but they say that, to those who are, music speaks. Heaven knows what you'd be saying to her through that pipe of yours.

DENIS. I would pipe beauty to her. I would play to her of the mystery of woods and the wonder of lonely moors. I would pipe of joy and love, of fierce winds in the mountain-top and the low, soft croon of lovers who murmur underneath the stars. I would pipe——

SENTRY. You would, that is, if I let you.

DENIS. If you let me!

SENTRY. Marzinne is my girl, piper. Do you think I'll have you making love-music to her?

DENIS. Your girl! Why, it's not ten minutes since you were prodding her with the butt end of a spear.

SENTRY. That was in the way of duty. I'm off duty now.

DENIS. But she wants me to play to her.

MARZINNE. Yes, I do.

SENTRY. Listen to me, Marzinne. I am a soldier. You've had the great good fortune to find favour in the eyes of one of His Majesty's Guards. This fellow—this worm—is a strolling piper, a wandering rogue, a——

DENIS. But if she loves the piper? How then, soldier?

SENTRY. Why, then the world's gone mad. But it will

never go so mad as for a girl to prefer the likes of you to a fine strapping military man.

DENIS. There is a magic in my pipe. I'll draw her, draw her from you. [*Puts pipe to lips.*]

SENTRY. Suppose I break your pipe?

MARZINNE. Oh!

SENTRY. Don't be afraid. It would be beneath my dignity.

DENIS. Then, Marzinne, I will talk to you through this pipe of mine, and he will hear, but only you will understand. You who are beautiful will hear the call of beauty wandering in wild places and——

SENTRY. Yes. That's talking through your hat, not through your pipe. Daft talk, too. A woman wants a home, and the pay of His Majesty's Guards, I assure you, is——

[DENIS *interrupts him by piping,* MARZINNE *is swayed by the music; she takes a pace towards* DENIS. *The* SENTRY *stands to attention. She turns to look at him. She stops moving to* DENIS. *One last look at* DENIS, *and she goes to the* SENTRY. *Together they go off.* DENIS *turns and sees them go. He takes pipe from lips, and sinks broken-heartedly to ground.*

DENIS. Oh, these flatterers! These flatterers! If only one honest person would believe in my skill!

[*Enter* HELÉNE. *She comes down shyly to* DENIS.

HELÉNE. Piper!

DENIS. Am I a piper? Once I thought I could draw magic from my pipe. Now I am almost in the mood to snap it across my knee. [*He rises.*] Will you be honest with me?

HELÉNE. I will try.

DENIS. What is your name?

HELÉNE. Heléne.

DENIS. Heléne. Yes, I remember you. You were here just now. Then you went and now you have come back again. What brought you back, Heléne?

HELÉNE. What brings the apple-blossom? Why does corn grow? Why does the magnet draw the steel?

DENIS. My music! My music is *that* to you?

HELÉNE. It brought me back. I think that it would bring me anywhere.

DENIS. Is this the truth at last? Has Heaven only tried my faith till now, and now takes pity on a hard-tried man and sends you as His messenger of hope? Oh, but is it true? Girl, are you honest?

HELÉNE. That is almost to insult me.

DENIS. No, no. But . . . a test, a test. See, I have here a mirror. This is a magic mirror, Heléne [*showing a pocket-mirror*]. It was given to my great-grandfather by Merlin, the great magician. This is its virtue, that whoever looks in it shall see the face of the one who admires you most. Look in it, Heléne, and tell me whose face you see. [HELÉNE *takes it fearfully and looks.*] You see your lover's face, no doubt. A handsome lad who admires you more than anyone. Perhaps he is a soldier, tall, brave . . .

HELÉNE. But . . . but I see my own face.

DENIS. Ah, you *are* honest! [*Takes mirror from her.*] I've played this trick on many a girl. They all pretend they see a lover's face. They pretend some man admires them more than they admire themselves. But you—you're honest. You saw your own face and admitted it. Now at last I shall learn the simple truth about my piping. Listen. [*He pipes a little.*] What do you hear in that?

HELÉNE. Oh, wonderful things. Things indescribable.

DENIS. Let me describe them, then. Pine-trees that rise

in scented ecstasy, branches that meet to make a dream cathedral, pine-needles soft beneath the trees to make a lovers' bed. We two, Heléne, wandering with music through the world, we two with music and with love. Sometimes I pipe in taverns and we gain a lodging for the night. Who cares? We've love, we've liberty, and in my pipe I have a greater power than kings shall ever know, the power to make man happy. And you . . . you'll dance. While I enchant their ears you will bewitch their eyes. You and I, the music-makers, the bringers of joy, the—— [HELÉNE *covers face with hands.*] Why do you cry?

HELÉNE. Oh, you . . . you pretend so beautifully.

DENIS. Pretend? Pretend?

HELÉNE. I was pretending too. I was pretending to be honest, and you make me feel ashamed of my pretence.

DENIS. But—— [*Puzzled.*]

HELÉNE. You see, I am a shoemaker's daughter.

DENIS. A shoemaker's? Has that anything to do with it?

HELÉNE. Yes. Shoemakers' daughters look at people's feet.

DENIS. Feet? [*He looks at his.*] Oh!

HELÉNE. When you changed your clothes you put on your own shoes, and they——

DENIS. You knew me all the time!

HELÉNE. Yes. Wouldn't any girl have pretended when it won her the chance of talking to the Prince?

DENIS. And what you said about my piping——?

HELÉNE. Oh, that was true. It was.

DENIS [*shaking head*]. I have no faith now. I'll break my pipe, and—— [*As he says this* JÈGU *enters with* LIZINA.

JÉGU [*hurrying to* DENIS *and checking him*]. You'll do nothing of the sort, my friend.

DENIS. I think that's my affair.

JÈGU. A public entertainer has no affairs, except to be entertaining. There is at this moment urgent need to entertain the populace. It's no time to shirk your duty. Go and distract the people.

DENIS. Is something wrong?

LIZINA. The Princess is——

JÈGU. Hush! Yes. Something is wrong, and you may tell the populace what it is. They are clamouring to know why the royal wedding is delayed. Listen. An emerald has fallen out of the ancient brooch which the Princess must wear, and the royal jeweller has the jaundice. A craftsman from the town is at present at work on the brooch, but he is slow, and till he has finished the wedding cannot take place. Take that message, spread it everywhere, and entertain the people with your pipe. Make them forgetful of this delay. Remember, I rely on you. I trust to you.

DENIS. Like other courtiers, you trust me with anything except the truth.

JÈGU. Eh? Don't be impertinent.

DENIS. Your emerald is a thin tale. Shall I tell you the real reason why the marriage is delayed? Shall I tell you that it takes two to make a marriage, a bridegroom and a bride, and that——?

JÈGU. Hush! Trees have ears. I don't know how you come to be aware that the Princess is missing, but——

DENIS. The Princess? I didn't know. Had she also doubts? Did she also not consent to wed——?

LIZINA. Young man, don't think aloud. It's dangerous.

JÈGU. I'm not sure that a dungeon isn't the safest place for you. It's either that or you will go and pipe till——

DENIS. Till the Prince comes? [*He laughs at* JÈGU's *dis-*

comfiture.] Come, Heléne. Let us be useful if we can't be beautiful. [*Puts pipe to lips and plays as he goes off with* HELÉNE.]

JÈGU [*mopping his brow*]. This is alarming. [*Sees statue.*] Why . . . I suppose I did give orders to the gardener?

LIZINA. I don't remember hearing you.

JÈGU. Women have faulty memories. The proof that I gave orders is here. Statues don't walk. Thank heaven, one little thing's gone right to-day. [*Enter* BERNÉZ. And another. Bernéz, Lord Bernéz!

BERNÉZ. Oh! The Lord Chancellor, I believe.

JÈGU. Yes. I'm delighted to see you. Officially, I welcome you. Unofficially, I could embrace you.

BERNÉZ. That's very good of you. I don't know what I've done to merit this cordiality.

JÈGU. You've come. You've arrived.

BERNÉZ. Yes?

JÈGU. And where you are his Highness Prince Denis is not far away.

BERNÉZ. I can't answer for that.

JÈGU. What!

BERNÉZ. I was officially dismissed yesterday. I am here to-day simply as one of the populace admitted to the gardens.

LIZINA. But where is the Prince?

BERNÉZ. I don't know, madam.

JÈGU. I did think things were coming right when I saw you. Lizina, I should almost prefer rats to this. At least you know where you are with rats.

[*The sound of the pipe is heard.* DENIS *enters, piping, and behind are* MARZINNE, HELÉNE, *the* SENTRY, *and the* PEASANT GIRLS *and* DANCERS. *They form for a dance.*

JÈGU. Ah, he *is* doing his duty. But I can't stand the

sight of other people being merry while I am in peril. Lord Bernéz, I appeal to you. Will you help me to search for the Prince?

BERNÉZ. Oh, yes—I'll come with you.

[*Exeunt* BERNÉZ, JÈGU, LIZINA.

[*The dance continues, and then ends. The* FIRST PEASANT GIRL, *who has not been with the rest, now runs on.*

FIRST GIRL [*excitedly*]. Mountebanks! Mountebanks! Oh, you should see them tumble and throw each other in the air!

SECOND GIRL. Where? Where?

FIRST GIRL. Over there.

THIRD GIRL. That's better than any piper.

SECOND GIRL. Especially such an ordinary one.

FIRST GIRL. Yes. Yes.

[*These lines are spoken as they go off, leaving* DENIS *alone but for* MAIE.

DENIS. Such an ordinary piper! And it has been said of my piping that it would turn stone to living flesh and blood. [*He looks at his pipe sadly, then makes as if to break it across his knee, and then, checking himself, raises the pipe.*] One last stave before I break you. Your swan-song, pipe. [*He sits on ground, with his back to the pedestal, and plays.*]

[MAIE *leans over. He looks up. She quickly poses again. He gets up from the ground.*

I could have sworn it moved. [*Passes back of his hand over forehead.*] I'm dreaming, dreaming.

[MAIE *moves her arm.*

No. It's true! The miracle has come. I have brought stone to life. You wonderful thing that I have made alive!

MAIE. Oh! . . .

DENIS. You can speak!

MAIE. Yes. Help me down.

[*He hands her from pedestal.*

You are Prince Denis?

DENIS. How did you know that?

MAIE. I wanted to be sure.

DENIS. Yes. I am Denis. But Prince? No; not of men. I'm Prince of Pipers, breathing life and warmth through this little pipe that is enchanted by my art. And you—mine. Mine more than woman was ever man's before. I have seen other women on my way——

MAIE [*jealously*]. Yes. Those peasant girls—and the shoemaker's daughter.

DENIS. You saw them? Yes. They were passers-by as I came along the road to you. I was groping, seeking, hoping to recognize in every face the one, the only woman. I didn't know, I couldn't guess how wonderfully you would come, how certainly I should know you when we met. I peered and pried, I travelled, I sought, and the search is over now. I've found you, and this—this is my journey's end. [*He kneels and kisses the hem of her dress.*]

[TÉPHANY *appears, as if to protect* MAIE. MAIE *waves her off.* TÉPHANY *goes reluctantly.*

MAIE. I didn't think it would be like this to be wooed.

DENIS. Have I offended? [*Rising.*]

MAIE. No. It chokes me, but it's a happy choking, like wanting to cry because you're so full of happiness that crying is the only thing you can think of doing.

DENIS. I feel that too. I've never felt like this before.

MAIE. Are you quite sure of that? Not when you talked about pine-trees to the shoemaker's daughter?

DENIS. It has never been like this. With you I feel choked, but as if I am full of something which is serene and sure and yet exalts me and increases me.

MAIE. That might be because you are so proud of your piping.

DENIS. I am proud of my piping, but I think it is you who exalt me.

MAIE. Because you think you brought me to life.

DENIS. No. Because you *are* alive. Because you are you.

MAIE. I hope that is true, Denis. I hope it very much because—— [*Hesitating.*]

DENIS. It is true. How you came does not matter. You have come. You—you are the miracle.

MAIE. Then I can tell you. I must tell you. Your playing—oh, it's beautiful, and you must never, never break your pipe [*touching it*], it's a blessed pipe, it brought us together, but, Denis, you are brave, aren't you? The piping did not bring a statue to life. If you were a princess and they wouldn't let you see the prince you were to marry before you met him in the cathedral, and you were determined to see him first, what would you do? A prince can disguise himself as a wandering minstrel, but a princess can only stand and wait. [*Indicating the pedestal.*]

DENIS. You are the Princess! You!

MAIE. Only a princess. Not stone to which your pipe gave life. Only a princess to whom you've given love. A princess, palace-bred. I can't live rough. I can't go wandering with you and sleep on the cold ground and——

DENIS. I was a dreamer, dreaming I could escape my fate, dreaming I had in this [*the pipe*] a power to make me different from other men. It seemed to me a gorgeous dream——

MAIE. Yes!

DENIS. No. Tawdry, tinsel, the dream of a runaway. And I was running from you. From you! I humble

myself before you, Maie. I am abased. [*Turning from her with bowed head.*]

MAIE. No, no. [*Taking his hand.*]

DENIS. You were the fate I ran from. You! It is not given to many men to awake from dreams to a sunrise such as you—my princess. [*Kissing her.*]

MAIE. My prince. My prince who is a piper.

DENIS. No. Who was.

MAIE. Is, is! You piped love into my heart. Keep your pipe, Denis, keep it, and if in the years to come you and I find Court-life is oppressing us then you will play to me, and in imagination we shall go along the great roads to your pine-woods. We'll find refreshment in the dreams your pipe will bring. Jègu—Jègu thinks it's Lord Chancellors who make the world go round. You and I know better than that. We know that it is dreams.

DENIS. Do you know everything?

MAIE. No. Only that I love.

[*They turn together up the garden, his arm round her waist. The* KING *enters, followed by two* VALETS *in chains, with* JÈGU, LIZINA, *and* BERNÉZ.

KING [*to* JÈGU, *who is protesting silently*]. No. I see absolutely no reason why you should not be committed to the darkest dungeon. I delegated to you my authority to bring this wedding about. And what happens? Not only is there no wedding, but the Princess has evaporated and the Prince has evaporated. It's unnatural.

JÈGU. But, sire——

KING. Yes, I suppose you're right. It is not unnatural. It's the natural result of my delegating my authority to a nincompoop. The only satisfaction I find in this is that it's a fine argument for personal monarchy.

JÈGU. No doubt now that your Majesty has taken control all will go well.

KING. You've a smooth tongue, Chancellor, a sly tongue. But I have no doubt all *will* go well now that I have taken control. I am a king.

LIZINA. May the humblest of your Majesty's servants be privileged to watch your Majesty recover the Princess?

KING. As a final lesson in my sovereign power, before you are incarcerated, you may. [*He steps forward.*] Now . . . er . . . now. [*Waves his hands vaguely; the others watching him.*] Er . . . let me see.

[DENIS *whispers to* MAIE, *and comes forward playing his pipe.*

[MAIE *runs off to change back to original costume.*

KING. What's that?

JÈGU. Only some of the populace, sire. [*To* DENIS] Keep away, fellow. [DENIS *kneels to the* KING.

DENIS. Sire, a mouse once helped a lion to get out of a net. Could not a minstrel help a king? Where a Chancellor has failed a lowly man should not be sanguine of success, but——

JÈGU. Of course he shouldn't. Go away.

DENIS. My lord, I am offering my service to the King, whose paramount and sovereign power must not be put in doubt. The King can do no wrong, the King must never fail at anything he undertakes to do.

KING. Very proper sentiments. Very loyal, but what service do you offer?

DENIS. Sire, this pipe of mine has certain powers.

JÈGU. Ha! I smell sorcery.

DENIS. Not sorcery, my lord, but willing service. And yet I doubt my pipe, sire, I doubt its performance of the service laid upon it, unless you will deign to touch it with your royal hand.

[*The* KING *extends his hand.* JÈGU *prevents his touching the pipe.*

JÈGU. This may be a snare, sire.

KING. Pooh! There's no danger here. [*He touches the pipe.*]

DENIS. Now I can promise. Now my pipe is strong indeed. Sire, I undertake to play upon this pipe your hand has blessed such a tune as will discover you the lost Prince and Princess, and bring them to their wedding.

JÈGU. The man is moonstruck.

KING. I think not, Jègu. I think this is how Chancellors fall and how earls are made. I needed service and the piper came. You would have had me fail, but he——

JÈGU. It's not done yet.

KING. Pooh! You're jealous.

DENIS. He underrates the value of the touch of your royal hand upon my pipe, sire——

KING. Exactly. [*To* DENIS] Name your own reward.

DENIS. I hadn't thought of any. But I will ask an amnesty for these two men in chains and for the Chancellor and the governess who stand condemned.

KING. Bring me the Prince and the Princess and I will pardon all offenders. After all, a king must have a Chancellor.

DENIS. And a piper must have his play.

[DENIS *pipes. As he begins the* PEASANT GIRLS, MARZINNE, HELÉNE, TÉPHANY, *all enter and form for a dance.* KING, JÈGU, BERNÉZ, LIZINA, *and* VALETS *join the dance.* DENIS, *still piping, goes off, and his music continues to be heard.* DENIS *changes to his prince's clothes, and as soon as he and* MAIE *are ready they enter from opposite sides and join the dance, then they head the procession as the whole company dances off.*

SQUARE PEGS

A POLITE SATIRE

By Clifford Bax

CHARACTERS

Hilda, *a modern girl*
Gioconda, *a sixteenth-century Venetian*

Mr Clifford Bax has been called "an exquisite of drama." He has, at any rate, nothing to do with realism, although he may have reality. He usually writes in verse; a comic opera of which he wrote the words brought Miss Marie Tempest back to a singing part at Hammersmith. The puppet-showman's song in his "Mr Pepys" was memorable, and he adapted "Polly," Gay's sequel to "The Beggar's Opera," for the modern stage.

The satirical theme of "Square Pegs" is the contrast between the love-making of the sixteenth century and that of the slangy, sentiment-fearing youth of to-day. The introduction of modern slang into rimed couplets required ingenuity as well as wit. The conclusion

That in all centuries life is goodly wine

is an admirable summing-up of the 'argument.'

SQUARE PEGS[1]

SCENE: *A garden. Entrance R. and L. L., a table and two chairs. The general effect should suggest a little lawn which leads outward in several directions.*

The arrival of a taxi-cab is heard, off. Enter L. HILDA, *in summer hat and dress, and with a light cloak on her arm. She carries a folding-map and a small book.*

HILDA [*speaking off, L.*]. What's that? "The taximeter points," you say,
"To fifteen shillings"? Well, didn't I pay
A pound? What? No, I *haven't* "made a slip."
Surely five shillings was a handsome tip.
[*Sound of a motor-horn growing fainter.*
The creature's gone. These taxi-men! . . . But wait;
Suppose that isn't really Merlin's Gate,
Nor this the garden where a girl who loathes
Our twentieth century (all except its clothes)
May turn the Book of Time to any page,
And move within some more romantic age?
The map will show. Yes, there's the gate, and there's
That wall, that table, these two empty chairs . . .
Everything's right. How wonderful, how splendid,
To know that here the roar of time has ended!
Now, let me see . . . [*Consulting her map.*]

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

If I should take that road
What century should I have for my abode?
"To Ancient Rome." Lovely!
[*She starts to go out R. Then stops.*
It might be serious,
Though, if I chanced on Nero or Tiberius.
The Romans were rough diamonds. . . . This way here—
So the map says—would lead me to the year
Ten-sixty-six. I won't be such a fool
As go back where I stuck so long at school.
William the First was always dull. I know
He'd make me listen to him—standing so,
With Bayeux hands, knee-crookèd, and neck-bowed—
While he read all the Domesday Book aloud.
I shan't go there. . . . Now, that's a pretty view! [*Referring to the map.*]
"The Eighteenth Century: Boswell Avenue."
I might try that. But no—that won't do either.
I'd have to wear a wig or tell them why there,
Love coffee-houses more than trees and birds,
And talk in such tremendously long words.
I know, I know! If I can find the way
I'll wander back into the sumptuous day,
When, in his gardens near the warm lagoon,
Titian gave feasts under the stars and moon.
That would be heavenly! Those were noble times.
There was a grandeur even about the crimes
Of people like the Borgias . . . and their dresses,
And the sweet way they wore their hair in tresses,
And—oh, and everything! What was Titian's date?
I mustn't err into a time too late;
But how to make quite sure? Suppose I took
My bearings by this little precious book—

Addington Symonds? . . . Oh, that I knew more!
Was it in fifteen-sixty or before?

[*Settling herself in one of the chairs, she becomes absorbed in her book. Enter R.* GIOCONDA, *carrying two or three modern novels.*

GIOCONDA [*speaking off, R.*]. I thank you, gondolier. You drowned my nurse
With true dramatic finish. Take this purse.
So—I am in that Garden where time speeds
Backward or forward as our fancy needs.
How sick I am of cloaks and ambuscades,
Of poison, daggers, moonlight serenades,
Of those dull dances that are all *I* trace—
Pavane, lavolte, forlana, cinquepace—
And the long pageant of our life at Venice!
Now, in the twentieth century there is tennis,
With cream and strawberries round a chestnut-tree,
And day-long idling in the June-blue sea,
And soda-fountains too, and motor-cars,
And Henley Weeks and Russian Ballet 'stars.'
Oh, what a wealth of joy that century has!
To think that I myself may learn to jazz!
Truly, I judge it has no slightest flaw—
The glorious age of Bennett, Wells, and Shaw.

[*She sets her books on the table and curtsies to them.*

Gramercy, gentlemen—inasmuch as you,
Here in your works, have taught me what to do,
How to play hockey, smoke, and bob my hair
In nineteen-twenty, when at last I'm there.
Which path would bring me there, I wonder? How
Choose of so many? If I'm near it now
I ought to hear the roaring of their trains,
Their motor-horns, their humming monoplanes. . . .

[*She listens intently for a moment.*

The very bees are silent. . . . [*Seeing* HILDA.
Who is that?
Surely, unless the books have lied, her hat
Came from renowned " Roulette's," in Portman Square!
A twentieth-century girl. *She* will know where
The Spaniards gather and the Black Friars dwell.
[*Kissing her hand, R.*
Farewell, Rialto! Bridge of Sighs, farewell!
[*She goes up to* HILDA, *and curtsies ceremoniously.*
Dear Signorina . . . Signorina . . . Deep
In Bennett's fragrant works—or can she sleep?
Could *The Five Towns* have bored her? Let me try
Once more. Most noble Signorina——
HILDA [*starting up*]. Why,
Who are you, lady? By your dress and ways
I think you must have come from Titian's days.
GIOCONDA. Indeed, I do. Old Titian! How he talks!
He did my portrait last July in chalks.
But grant me the great liberty, I pray,
Of asking what your name is——
HILDA. Hilda Gray.
GIOCONDA. How sweet and to the point!
HILDA. And yours?
GIOCONDA. Gioconda
Francesca Violante Giulia della Bionda.
HILDA. A poem in itself! The velvet verse
Of Tasso is not softer to rehearse.
What can have led you to forgo an age
When life was an illuminated page
From some superb romance?
GIOCONDA. And what, I wonder,
Can have torn you and your fair time asunder?
HILDA. I'll tell you, for I'm sure you'll sympathize.
I have a lover——

GIOCONDA. That is no surprise.
HILDA. And by the post this morning came a letter——
GIOCONDA. From him?
HILDA. From him.
GIOCONDA. What could have happened better?
HILDA. Ah! naturally you think that Harry writes
Of longing, suicide, and sleepless nights.
Did he, I'd read his letters ten times over—
But you don't know the twentieth-century lover.
Oh, for a man who'd write through tears, all swimmily,
And woo me with grand metaphor and simile!
I couldn't bear the slang that Harry used
In asking for my hand.
GIOCONDA. So you refused!
HILDA. Yes, and came here to seek a braver time.
GIOCONDA. How odd! *I* had a letter, all in rhyme,
Brought by a lackey to my father's gate
Just when dawn broke. As if I couldn't wait!
He dashed up, panting; and his horse's mouth
Was flecked with blood and foam . . .
HILDA [*clasping her hands*]. The passionate South!
GIOCONDA. The fellow gave the letter, gasped, went red,
And straightway horse and lackey fell down dead.
I scanned the note, observed the flowery phrases
In which the writer smothered me with praises;
Compared them with the style of Bernard Shaw,
And told him straightway that he might withdraw.
HILDA. If I could see that letter!
GIOCONDA. So you shall,
Sweet friend—or, rather, right you are, old pal.
I'll read it.
[*She produces a letter tied with rose-coloured ribbon.*
HILDA. Do! . . . I see his passion's flood
Demands red ink.

GIOCONDA. Oh, dear, no—that's his blood.
Now, listen. Did you ever hear a style
Quite so absurd? I call it simply vile.

[*Reading*]

" Adored Gioconda—glittering star
Unsullied by the dusty world,
Rich rose with leaves but half uncurled,
New Venus in thy dove-drawn car—
Have pity ; drive thy wrath afar.
Let Cupid's war-flag be upfurled,
Lest by thy gentle hand be hurled
The mortal bolt that leaves no scar.

" So prays upon his aching knee
Thy humble vassal, once the fear
Of Christendom, but now—woe's me!—
One whose wild prayers Love will not hear,
Who treads the earth and has no home—
Giulio Pandolfo, Duke of Rome."

HILDA. Gioconda, what a lover!
GIOCONDA. So *I* think—
His brain a dictionary, his blood mere ink.
HILDA. *I* mean how rare a lover! Would that mine
Had brains to pen a letter half so fine!
GIOCONDA. How does he write?
HILDA. Write! Would you deign to call
This ' writing '—this illiterate blotted scrawl?

[*Reading*]

" Dear Hilda, if you buy *The Star*
To-night you mustn't for the world
Suppose he got my hair uncurled——
That blighter who kyboshed the car.

He had the worst of it by far
  Because the hood on mine was furled.
  Good Lord! what steep abuse he hurled!
Yours, Harry—with a nasty scar.

"P.S.—The cut's above the knee,
  And won't be right just yet, I fear.
Oh, and what price you marrying me?
  Anything doing? Let me hear.
Ring up to-morrow, if you're home.
Where shall we do our bunk? To Rome?"

Now, wasn't that enough to make me mad?
It is a shame! It really is too bad!
"Dear Hilda"—plain "dear"! And what girl could marry
A man who, when proposing, ends "yours, Harry"?
GIOCONDA. I love his downright manner. In my mind
I see him, a tall figure; and, behind,
His old two-seater. Yes, I see him plainly—
Close-cropped——
HILDA. Half bald.
GIOCONDA. Slow-moving——
HILDA. And ungainly.
GIOCONDA. A brow like H. G. Wells' my fancy draws,
An eye like Bennett's, and a beard like Shaw's.
I know your Harry—just the English type,
A silent strong man married to his pipe,
With so few words, except about machines,
That he can never tell you what he means;
But were *I* his, and we two went a-walking,
What should that matter? *I* could do the talking.
HILDA. Surely you see, Gioconda, I require
A lover who can make love with some fire.

GIOCONDA. And I a lover so much overcome
By deep emotion that it leaves him dumb.
HILDA. No poetry? Then, so far as I can tell,
The twentieth century ought to suit you well. . . .
I've an idea!
GIOCONDA. What is it?
HILDA. This; that you
Show me how best you'd like a man to woo.
GIOCONDA. I will, I will!
HILDA. Imagine, then, that I
Am she for whom you say you'd gladly die.
This is my room at Baystead; that's the street;
You must come in from there . . . [*leading her L.*] and then we meet.
GIOCONDA. By Holy Church, a pretty sport to play!
God shield you, Signorina Hilda Gray! [*Exit L.*
HILDA. Now—what's the time? It must be half-past four.
It is. I'll give him just one minute more.
[*Looking at herself in a pocket-mirror, and making a toilet.*
Goodness! I do look horrid. . . . Will he bring
An emerald or a pearl engagement-ring?
He comes! I'll take pearls as a last resort.
[*Enter, L.,* GIOCONDA, *carrying a pipe and a walking-stick.*
GIOCONDA. Well, and how *are* you? In the pink, old sport?
HILDA. I'm glad to see you, Harry. Do sit down.
GIOCONDA. 'Some' heat to-day, what? Even here. In town
Perfectly awful. Got a match?
[*She tries in vain to light the pipe from a match struck by* HILDA.

I say,
Old thing—you really look top-hole to-day.

HILDA. Well, naturally; I knew that you were coming.

[GIOCONDA *pulls at her pipe in silence, pokes the floor with her stick, and shifts it from hand to hand.*

You're very quiet.

GIOCONDA [*with a start*]. Oh! what's that you're thumbing?

[*Goes over to* HILDA *and looks over her shoulder.*

HILDA. Addington Symonds.

GIOCONDA. Any good?

HILDA. Why—gorgeous!
You ought to read it—all about the Borgias.

GIOCONDA. What are they? Oh, I see! I had enough
Up at the 'Varsity of that sort of stuff.
I say—oh, blast the thing, this pipe's a dud!

[*She puts the pipe on the table.*

HILDA. You smoke too much. They say it slows the blood,
And *that* you simply can't afford. [*Pause.*

GIOCONDA. I say——

HILDA. Well, what?

GIOCONDA. You really look top-hole to-day.

HILDA. How nice! But flattery always was your wont.

[*Pause.*

GIOCONDA. I say——

HILDA. That's just it, Harry dear—you don't.

GIOCONDA. I came to ask you something. . . . [*Producing a ring*] Ever seen
A ring like this? Not a bad sort of green.

HILDA [*taking it*]. Emeralds! I worship emeralds. They enthrone
All the luxuriant summer in a stone.
Do let me just see how it looks! The third
Finger, I think, is generally preferred?
How splendid! Won't she be delighted?

GIOCONDA. Who?
HILDA. Your dear Aunt Kate.
GIOCONDA. I bought the thing for you.
HILDA. Harry!
GIOCONDA. *You* know—a what-d'you-call-it ring?
HILDA. Engagement?
GIOCONDA. That's the goods. And in the spring
The parson gets our guinea. What about it?
HILDA. See, how it fits! I couldn't do without it.
GIOCONDA. Right-o! Then, that's that; good! But if you carry
A diary, jot down, "Next spring, marry Harry"—
You might forget. You keep a diary?
HILDA [*bringing a small diary from her bag*]. Look—
I did blush—buying an engagement-book!
GIOCONDA. Well, how's the enemy? Good Lord! what a shock!
D'you know, old bean, it's more than five o'clock?
HILDA. You'll have some tea?
GIOCONDA. Can't. Sorry. Told two men
I'd play a foursome with them at five-ten.
You'd better make the fourth.
HILDA. I really can't.
There are some new delphiniums I *must* plant.
GIOCONDA [*going out L.*]. See you to-morrow, then.
HILDA. You'll drive me frantic
If you're not just the teeniest bit romantic!
GIOCONDA. It isn't done. You're absolutely wiong
In asking me to do that stunt. So long!
[*She tosses the pipe and stick off, L.*
There! Did I play it well? You'd be my wife?
HILDA [*sighing*]. My dear, you played old Harry to the life—
His *gaucherie* . . .

GIOCONDA. His noble self-command . . .
HILDA. The way he shifts his cane from hand to hand . . .
GIOCONDA. A nervous trick that shows how much he feels . . .
HILDA. All I know is—I'd have a man who kneels
And pours out passion in a style as rippling
As the best Swinburne—or at least as Kipling.
GIOCONDA. Then I'll now be *your* lady. To your part—
Woo me as you'd be wooed!
HILDA. With all my heart!
[*Catching up her cloak, she flings it over her shoulder.*
Last Miracle of the World, sainted, adored,
Divine Gioconda—hear me, I beg!
GIOCONDA. My lord!
HILDA. Dost know of passion? Is that heart so pure
As not to guess what torments I endure
Who for so long have sighed for thee in vain?
And wilt thou have no pity on my pain?
Wilt thou still spurn me as a thing abhorred,
Whose only crime is to love thee?
GIOCONDA. My lord——
HILDA. Stay! I will brook no answer. For thy sake
Did I not paint the town in crimson-lake?
Have I not wrenched thee through thy nunnery-bars?
And bear I not some ninety-seven scars
Taken as I fought my way to thy fair feet?
Think how thy relatives rushed into the street
To save thee—how I put them to the sword
And left them strewn about in heaps!
GIOCONDA. My lord——
HILDA. Had I a boy's light love when I, to win
Thy favour, cut off all thy kith and kin?
Run through the list! Measure my love by that!
Two great-grandfathers (one, I own, was fat);

Five brothers; fourteen uncles; half a score
Of nephews (and I dare say even more);
A brace of maiden aunts; a second cousin;
And family connexions by the dozen.
Does it not melt that pitiless heart of ice
To see thyself secured at such a price?

GIOCONDA. My lord——

HILDA. Or if indeed thy heart requires
Flame fiercer than my love's Etnæan fires—
Ask what thou wilt, but do not ask that I
Live on. Command me, rather, how to die.
Say in what style thou'dst have me perish here,
So that at least my ardour win one tear!
Choose what thou wilt—I'll execute thy charge—
Nor fear to speak; my *répertoire* is large.
I can suspend myself upon a rafter;
Fall on my blade, and die with horrid laughter;
Leap from a height; read Bennett's books; or swallow
Poison—and, mark you, with no sweet to follow.

GIOCONDA. My lord——

HILDA. Thy choice is made?

GIOCONDA. My lord——

HILDA. Alack!

GIOCONDA. I have accepted thee ten minutes back.

HILDA. Then—I will deign to live. My castle stands
Four-towered among its olive-silvered lands.
Away! Away! Thou art all heaven to me!

[*She drags* GIOCONDA *R. They break.*

GIOCONDA. Wonderful! That's Pandolfo to a tee!

HILDA. I should adore him!

GIOCONDA. And I Harry, too. . . .
If only you were I and I were you!
But soft! since here we stand beyond the range
Of Time, why don't we swap?

HILDA. You mean 'exchange'?
Why not? We will! [*Moving quickly R.*] May Titian's age
enfold me!
GIOCONDA. Stop! Stop! You can't go yet. You haven't
told me
Where I can find the twentieth century.
HILDA [*leading her front, and pointing to the audience*].
Then,
Behold its ladies and its gentlemen.
GIOCONDA. What lovely people! . . . All the same, you
know,
They're not as I have pictured them.
HILDA. How so?
GIOCONDA. They're all so still. . . . And then—my fancy
boggles
To see not one who's wearing motor-goggles.
How can I get among them?
HILDA. You must jump
Down there.
GIOCONDA. But that would mean a dreadful bump!
HILDA. You want to go from fifteen-sixty sheer
To nineteen-twenty. 'Tis a jump, my dear. . . .
And so—farewell! I come, I come at last,
O fire and sound and perfumes of the Past!
[*She goes out quickly R.*
GIOCONDA. Her eyes were green. However hard he tries,
Pandolfo never can resist green eyes.
I know he'll die for her and not for me.
Why did I let her go? It shall not be! [HILDA *enters R.*
HILDA. It shall not be! Why did I let her go?
Harry will love her more than me, I know.
Gioconda!
GIOCONDA. Hilda!
HILDA. Somehow, after all,

I can't let Harry go beyond recall.
I think of his good heart; I know how proud
I'll be to watch him through a dusty cloud
When his new car, balanced upon one tyre,
Rolls roistering through the lanes of Devonshire.

GIOCONDA. I too, fair friend, perceive with sudden terror
The greatness of my momentary error.
I mustn't let you risk the enterprise. . . .
Pandolfo never could endure green eyes!

HILDA. Let us each make the best of her own age!

GIOCONDA. But sometimes you will write me—just a page?

HILDA. I will indeed. And you?

GIOCONDA. And so will I.
Hilda—farewell!

HILDA. Gioconda dear—good-bye!

[*Standing in the middle of the stage, they take hands and kiss. Then they come to the front, L. and R.*

So ends our fantasy—the slight design
Arisen and gone like sound in summer trees.

GIOCONDA. The burden such as every mind may seize—
That in all centuries life is goodly wine!

HILDA. Which has the more of joy, her age or mine,
We leave you to determine as you please.

GIOCONDA. Mine has the painting-schools—the Sienese,
Venetian, and unchallenged Florentine.

HILDA. Mine has the knowledge that our mortal pains
Are fleeing from the skilled physician's arts.

GIOCONDA. Mine the delight of unspoiled hills and plains,
Fair speech, adventure, and romantic hearts.

HILDA. And mine a sense that, by the single sun
That all men share, the world for man is one.

THE MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT

A TERRIBLY EXCITING AFFAIR

By A. A. Milne

CHARACTERS

John
Mary
Hero
Heroine
Chief Villain
Bad Man

Mr A. A. Milne, like Robert Louis Stevenson, has won fame in at least three different worlds. His first success was gained by his delightful articles and sketches in *Punch*, of which he was the assistant-editor; he then turned to drama, and his "Mr Pim Passes By" and "The Truth about Blayds" were distinguished successes; and during the last few years Mr Milne has given us verses and children's stories like *When We Were Very Young*, *Winnie the Pooh*, and *Now We Are Six*, which (unlike many children's books) are immensely popular with children.

Mr Milne's one-act plays reveal great versatility. His "The Boy Comes Home" was included in the first series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*.

THE MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT[1]

The scene is MARY'S *sitting-room—the most ordinary sitting-room in the world.* JOHN *and* MARY, *two of the most ordinary people, he in the early forties, she in the late thirties, are sitting in front of the fire after dinner. He, as usual, is reading the paper; she, as usual, is knitting. They talk in a desultory way.*

MARY. Did I tell you that Mrs Patchett had just had another baby?

JOHN [*not looking up from his paper*]. Yes, dear, you told me.

MARY. Did I? Are you sure?

JOHN. Last week.

MARY. But she only had it yesterday. Mr Patchett told me this morning when I was ordering the cauliflower.

JOHN. Ah! Then perhaps you told me she was going to have one.

MARY. Yes, I think that must have been it.

JOHN. This is the one that she was going to have?

MARY. It weighed seven pounds exactly.

JOHN. Of course, being a grocer, he would have the scales ready. Boy or girl?

MARY. Boy.

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

JOHN. The first boy, isn't it?

MARY. The second.

JOHN [*sticking to it*]. The first one that weighed seven pounds exactly.

[*They are silent again—he reading, she knitting.*

MARY. Anything in the paper to-night?

JOHN [*turning over the paper*]. A threatened strike of boiler-makers.

MARY. Does that matter very much?

JOHN. It says here that the situation is extremely serious.

MARY. Tell me about it.

JOHN [*not very good at it*]. Well, the—er—boiler-makers are threatening to strike. [*Weightily*] They are threatening not to make any more—er—boilers.

MARY. Kitchen boilers?

JOHN [*with an explanatory gesture*]. Boilers. They are threatening not to make any more of them. And—well—that's how it is. [*Returning to his paper*] The situation is extremely serious. Exciting scenes have been witnessed.

MARY. What sort of scenes?

JOHN. Well, naturally, when you have a lot of men threatening not to make any more boilers . . . and—er—a lot of other men threatening that if they *don't* make any —well, exciting scenes are witnessed. *Have* been witnessed by this man, this special correspondent.

MARY [*after a pause*]. It's a funny thing that nothing exciting ever happens to *us*.

JOHN. It depends what you mean by exciting. I went round in 95 last Saturday—as I think I told you.

MARY. Yes, but I mean something really thrilling—and dangerous. Like in a novel—or on the stage.

JOHN. My dear Mary, nothing like that ever happens in real life. I mean, it wouldn't happen to *us*.

MARY. Would you like it if it did?

[*He says nothing for a moment. Then he puts down his paper, and sits there, thinking. At last he turns to her.*

JOHN [*almost shyly*]. I used to imagine things like that happening. Years ago. Rescuing a beautiful maiden and —and all that sort of thing. And being wrecked on a desert island with her. . . . [*He turns away from her, staring into his dreams.*] Or pushing open a little green door in a long, high wall, and finding myself in a wonderful garden under the bluest of blue skies, and waiting, waiting . . . for something. . . .

MARY. I used to imagine things too. People fighting duels because of me. . . . Silly, isn't it? Nothing ever really happens like that.

JOHN [*still with his thoughts*]. No. . . .

[*At this moment a* STRANGE MAN *comes in. Contrary to all etiquette, he is wearing a bowler hat and an overcoat, and has a half-smoked cigar in his mouth. He walks quickly across the room and sits down in a chair with his back to the audience.* JOHN *and* MARY, *deep in their thoughts, do not notice him.*

MARY [*looking into the fire*]. I suppose we're too old for it now.

JOHN. I suppose so.

MARY. If it had only happened once—just for the memories.

JOHN. So that we could say to each other—— Good Lord! what's that?

[*It was the crack of a revolver. No mistaking it, even by* JOHN, *who has never been much of a hand with revolvers.*

MARY [*frightened*]. John!

[*There is a scuffling noise outside the door. They*

look eagerly towards it. Then suddenly there is dead silence. The MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT *flicks some of his cigar-ash on to the carpet—* MARY'S *carpet.*

JOHN. Look!

[*Very slowly the door begins to open. Through the crack comes a long, sinuous hand. The door opens farther, and the hand is followed by a long, sinuous body. Still the* MAN IN THE BOWLER HAT *says nothing. Then the door is closed, and leaning up against it, breathing rather quickly, is the* HERO, *in his hand a revolver.* JOHN *and* MARY *look at each other wonderingly.*

JOHN [*with a preliminary cough*]. I—I beg your pardon?

HERO [*turning quickly, finger to his lips*]. H'sh!

JOHN [*apologetically*]. I beg your pardon!

[*The* HERO *listens anxiously at the door. Then, evidently reassured for the moment, he comes towards them.*

HERO [*to* JOHN]. Quick, take this! [*He presses his revolver into* JOHN'S *hand.*]

JOHN. I—er—what do I——?

HERO [*to* MARY]. And you! This! [*He takes another revolver from his hip-pocket and presses it into* MARY'S *hand.*]

MARY. Thank you. Do we——?

HERO [*sternly*]. H'sh!

MARY. Oh, I beg your pardon.

HERO. Listen!

[*They all listen.* JOHN *and* MARY *have never listened so intently before, but to no purpose. They hear nothing.*

JOHN [*in a whisper*]. What is it?

HERO. Nothing.

JOHN. Yes, that's what *I* heard.

HERO. Have you got a—— [*He breaks off and broods.*]

MARY. A what?

HERO [*shaking his head*]. No, it's too late now.

JOHN [*to* MARY]. Haven't we got one?

MARY. I ordered one on Saturday, but it hasn't come.

HERO. You wait here—that will be best. I shall be back in a moment.

JOHN. What do we do?

HERO. Listen. That's all. Listen.

JOHN [*eagerly*]. Yes, yes.

HERO. I shall be back directly.

[*Just as he is making for the window the door opens and the* HEROINE—*obviously—comes in. They stand gazing at each other.*

HEROINE. Oh! [*But with a world of expression in it.*

HERO. Oh! [*With even more expression.*

HEROINE. My love!

HERO. My beautiful!

[*They meet and are locked in an embrace.*

JOHN [*to* MARY]. I suppose they're engaged to be married.

MARY. Oh, I think they must be.

JOHN. They've evidently *met* before.

HERO [*lifting his head for a moment*]. My Dolores! [*He bites her neck again.*]

JOHN [*to* MARY]. I think this must be both "How do you do" *and* "Good-bye."

MARY [*wistfully*]. He is very good-looking.

JOHN [*casually*]. Oh, do you think so? Now *she's* pretty, if you like.

MARY [*doubtfully*]. Ye-es. Very bad style, of course.

JOHN [*indignantly*]. My dear Mary——

HEROINE [*to* HERO]. Quick, quick, you must go!

HERO. Never—now that I have found you again.

HEROINE. Yes, yes! My father is hot upon your tracks. He will be here at any moment in his two-seater.

HERO [*turning pale*]. Your father!

HEROINE. I walked on ahead to warn you. He has come for—IT!

JOHN [*to* MARY]. What on earth's IT?

HERO [*staggering*]. IT!

HEROINE. Yes.

JOHN [*to* MARY]. Income-tax collector.

HERO. The Rajah's Ruby!

MARY. Oh, how exciting!

HEROINE. Yes, he knows you have it. He is determined to wrest it from you.

HERO. Never!

JOHN. Well done! Bravo! [*Offering his cigarette-case*] Would you care for a—— [*But the* HERO *spurns it.*]

HEROINE. There is no mischief he might not do, if once it were in his possession. Three prominent members of Society would be ruined, there would be another war in Mexico, and the exchange value of the rouble would be seriously impaired. Promise me you will never give it up.

HERO. I promise.

HEROINE. I must go. I am betraying my father by coming here, but I love you.

JOHN [*to* MARY]. She does love him. I thought she did.

MARY. How could she help it?

HERO. I adore you!

JOHN. You see, he adores her too. It certainly looked like it.

MARY. I still don't think she's very good style.

HEROINE. Then—good-bye! [*They embrace again.*

JOHN [*after a decent interval*]. Excuse me, sir, but if you

have a train to catch—I mean, if your future father-in-law's two-seater is any good at all, oughtn't you to be—er——

HERO [*releasing* HEROINE]. Good-bye! [*He conducts her to the door, gives her a last long lingering look, and lets her go.*]

MARY [*to herself*]. Pretty, of course, in a kind of way, but I must say I don't *like* that style.

[*The* HERO *comes out of his reverie and proceeds to business.*

HERO [*briskly to* JOHN]. You have those revolvers?

JOHN. Yes.

HERO. Then wait here, and listen. More than one life depends upon it.

JOHN. How many more?

HERO. If you hear the slightest noise——

JOHN [*eagerly*]. Yes?

HERO. H'sh!

[*He goes to the window, waits there listening for a moment, and then slips out. . . .* JOHN *and* MARY *remain, their ears outstretched.*

JOHN [*with a start*]. H'sh! What's that?

MARY. What was it, dear?

JOHN. I don't know.

MARY. It's so awkward when you don't quite know what you're listening *for.*

JOHN. H'sh! We were told to listen, and we must listen. More than one life depends on it.

MARY. All right, dear.

[*They continue to listen. A little weary of it,* MARY *looks down the barrel of the revolver to see if she can see anything interesting.*

JOHN [*observing her*]. Don't do that! It's very dangerous

to point a loaded revolver at yourself. If anything happened it would be too late to say afterwards that you didn't mean it.

MARY. Very well, John—— Oh, look!

[*Again the door opens quickly, and a sinister gentleman in a fur coat inserts himself into the room. We recognize him at once as the* CHIEF VILLAIN. *Very noiselessly, his back to* JOHN *and* MARY, *he creeps along the wall towards the window.*

JOHN [*in a whisper*]. Father-in-law.

MARY. Do we—— ? [*She indicates the revolver.*]

JOHN [*doubtfully*]. I—I—suppose—— [*He raises his gun hesitatingly.*]

MARY. Oughtn't you to say something first?

JOHN. Yes—er—— [*He clears his throat warningly.*] Ahem!

[*The* CHIEF VILLAIN *continues to creep towards the window.*

You, sir!

MARY [*politely*]. Do you want anything, or—or anything?

[*The* CHIEF VILLAIN *is now at the window.*

JOHN. Just a moment, sir.

[*The* CHIEF VILLAIN *opens the window and steps out between the curtains.*

MARY. Oh, he's gone!

JOHN. I call that very bad manners.

MARY. Do you think he'll come back?

JOHN [*with determination*]. I shall shoot him like a dog if he does. [*Waving aside all protests*] Like a dog.

MARY. Yes, dear, perhaps that *would* be best.

JOHN. Look out, he's coming back.

[*He raises his revolver as the door opens. Again the* CHIEF VILLAIN *enters cautiously, and creeps towards the window.*

MARY [*in a whisper*]. Shoot!

JOHN [*awkwardly*]. Er—I suppose it *is* the same man?

MARY. Yes, yes!

JOHN. I mean—it wouldn't be quite fair if—— [*He coughs warningly.*] Excuse me, sir!

[*The* CHIEF VILLAIN *is now at the window again.*

MARY. Quick, before he goes!

JOHN [*raising his revolver nervously*]. I ought to tell you, sir—— [*To* MARY] You know, I still think this is a different one.

[*The* CHIEF VILLAIN *again disappears through the window.*

MARY [*in great disappointment*]. Oh, he's gone!

JOHN [*firmly*]. It was a different one. The other one hadn't got a moustache.

MARY. He had, John. It was the same man, of course it was.

JOHN. Oh! Well, if I had known that, if I had only been certain of it, I should have shot him like a dog.

A VOICE [*which sounds like the* HERO'S]. Help, help!

MARY. John, listen!

JOHN. I *am* listening.

A VOICE. He-e-elp!

MARY. Oughtn't we to do something?

JOHN. We *are* doing something. We're listening. That's what he told us to do.

A VOICE. Help!

JOHN [*listening*]. That's the other man; the one who came in first.

MARY. The nice-looking one. Oh, John, we *must* do something.

JOHN. If he calls out again I shall—I shall—do something.

I shall take steps. I may even have to shoot somebody. But I will *not* have——

A VOICE. Quick, quick!

MARY. There!

JOHN. Er—was that the same voice?

MARY [*moving to the door*]. Yes, of course it was. It sounded as if it were in the hall. Come along.

JOHN. Wait a moment. [*She turns round.*] We must keep cool, Mary. We mustn't be impetuous. Just hold this a moment. [*He hands her his revolver.*]

MARY [*surprised*]. Why, what——

JOHN. I shall take my coat off. [*He takes off his coat very slowly.*] I'm going through with this. I'm not easily roused, but when once——

A VOICE. Help! Quick!

JOHN [*reassuringly*]. All right, my man, all right. [*Very leisurely he rolls up his sleeves.*] I'm not going to have this sort of thing going on in *my* house. I'm not going to have it. [*Doubtfully*] I don't think I need take my waistcoat off too. What do *you* think, Mary?

MARY [*impatiently*]. No, dear, of course not, you look very nice.

JOHN [*very determined*]. Now, then, let's have that revolver. [*She gives it to him.*] I shall say "Hands up!"—very sharply, like that—"*Hands up!*"—and then if he doesn't put his hands up I shall—I shall say "Hands up!" again. That will show him that I'm not to be trifled with. Now, then, dear, are you ready?

MARY [*eagerly*]. Yes!

JOHN. Then—— [*But at that moment the lights go out.*

MARY. Oh!

JOHN [*annoyed*]. Now, why did you do that, Mary?

MARY. I didn't do it, dear.

JOHN. Then who did?

MARY. I don't know. They just went out.

JOHN. Then I shall write to the company to-morrow and complain. I shall complain to the company about the lights, and I shall complain to the landlord about the way people go in and out of this house, and shriek and——

MARY [*in alarm*]. Oh!

JOHN. *Don't* do that! What is it?

MARY. I can feel somebody quite close to me.

JOHN. Well, that's me.

MARY. Not you, somebody else. . . . Oh! He touched me!

JOHN [*addressing the darkness*]. Really, sir, I must ask you not to——

MARY. Listen! I can hear breathings all round me!

JOHN. Excuse me, sir, but do you mind *not* breathing all round my wife?

MARY. There! Now I can't hear anything.

JOHN [*complacently*]. There you are, my dear. You see what firmness does. I wasn't going to have *that* sort of thing going on in my house.

[*The lights go up and reveal the* HERO *gagged so that only his eyes are visible, and bound to a chair.*

MARY [*clinging to her husband*]. Oh, John!

JOHN [*with sudden desperate bravery*]. Hands up! [*He levels his revolver.*]

MARY. Don't be silly, how can he?

JOHN. All right, dear, I was only practising. [*He blows a speck of dust off his revolver, and holds it up to the light again.*] Yes, it's quite a handy little fellow. I think I shall be able to do some business with this all right.

MARY. Poor fellow! I wonder who it is.

[*The* HERO *tries to speak with his eyes and movements of the head.*

JOHN. He wants something. Perhaps it's the evening paper. [*He makes a movement towards it.*]

MARY. Listen! [*The* HERO *begins to tap with his feet.*

JOHN. He's signalling something.

MARY. Dots and dashes!

JOHN. That's the Morse code, that's what that is. Where's my dictionary? [*He fetches it hastily and begins to turn over the pages.*]

MARY. Quick, dear!

JOHN [*reading*]. Here we are. "1. Morse—the walrus." [*Looking at the* HERO] No, that must be wrong. Ah, this is better. "2. Morse code signalling of telegraph-operators —as 'He sends a good morse.'"

MARY. Well? What does it say?

JOHN. Nothing. That's all. Then we come to "Morsel —a small piece of food, a mouthful, a bite. Also a small meal."

MARY [*brilliantly*]. A mouthful! That's what he means! He wants the gag taken out of his mouth. [*She goes to him.*]

JOHN. That's very clever of you, Mary. I should never have thought of that.

MARY [*untying the gag*]. There! . . . Why, it's the man who came in first, the nice-looking one!

JOHN. Yes, he *said* he was coming back.

[*Before the* HERO *can express his thanks—if that is what he wants to express—the* CHIEF VILLAIN, *accompanied by a* BAD MAN, *comes in.* JOHN *and* MARY *instinctively retreat.*

CHIEF VILLAIN [*sardonically*]. Ha!

JOHN [*politely*]. Ha to you, sir.

[*The* CHIEF VILLAIN *fixes* JOHN *with a terrible eye.* [*Nervously to* MARY.] Say "Ha!" to the gentleman, dear.

MARY [*faintly*]. Ha!

CHIEF VILLAIN. And what the Mephistopheles are *you* doing here?

JOHN [*to* MARY]. What *are* we doing here?

MARY [*bravely*]. This is our house.

JOHN. Yes, this is *our* house.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Then siddown! [JOHN *sits down meekly.* Is this your wife?

JOHN. Yes. [*Making the introduction*] Er—my wife—er—Mr—er—the gentleman——

CHIEF VILLAIN. Then tell her to siddown too.

JOHN [*to* MARY]. He wants you to siddown. [*She does so.*

CHIEF VILLAIN. That's better. [*To* BAD MAN] Just take their guns off 'em.

BAD MAN [*taking the guns*]. Do you want them tied up or gagged or anything?

CHIEF VILLAIN. No, they're not worth it.

JOHN [*humbly*]. Thank you.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Now, then, to business. [*To* HERO] Where's the Rajah's Ruby?

HERO [*firmly*]. I shan't tell you.

CHIEF VILLAIN. You won't?

HERO. I won't.

CHIEF VILLAIN. That's awkward. [*After much thought*] You absolutely refuse to?

HERO. I absolutely refuse to.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Ha! [*To* BAD MAN] Torture the prisoner.

BAD MAN [*cheerfully*]. Right you are, governor. [*He feels on the lapel of his coat, and then says to* MARY] Could you oblige me with the loan of a pin, mum?

MARY. I don't think—— [*Finding one*] Here you are.

BAD MAN. Thanks. [*He advances threateningly upon the prisoner.*]

CHIEF VILLAIN. Wait! [*To* HERO] Before proceeding to

extremities I will give you one more chance. Where is the Rujah's Raby?

BAD MAN. You mean the Rabah's Rujy, don't you, governor?

CHIEF VILLAIN. That's what I said.

JOHN [*wishing to help*]. You *said* the Rubah's Rajy, but I think you meant the Rhubarb's——

CHIEF VILLAIN. Silence. [*To* HERO] I ask you again—where is the Ruj—I mean where is the Rab—— Well, anyhow, where *is* it?

HERO. I won't tell you.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Proceed, Mr Smithers.

BAD MAN. Well, you've asked for it, mate. [*He pushes the pin into the* HERO's *arm.*]

HERO. Ow!

MARY. Oh, poor fellow!

CHIEF VILLAIN. Silence! Where is——

[*The* HERO *shakes his head.*

Torture him again, Mr Smithers.

HERO. No, no! Mercy! I'll tell you.

JOHN [*indignantly*]. Oh, I say!

BAD MAN. Shall I just give him another one for luck, governor?

HERO. Certainly not!

JOHN [*to* MARY]. Personally I think he should have held out much longer.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Very well, then. Where is the Rajah's Ruby?

HERO. In the cloak-room of Waterloo Station. In a hat-box.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*doubtfully*]. In the cloak-room at Waterloo Station, you say?

HERO. Yes. In a hat-box. Now release me.

CHIEF VILLAIN. How do I know it's there?

HERO. Well, how do *I* know?

CHIEF VILLAIN. True. [*Holding out his hand*] Well, give me the ticket for it.

HERO. I haven't got it.

BAD MAN. Now, then, none of that.

HERO. I haven't really.

JOHN. I don't think he'd say he *hadn't* got it if he *had* got it. Do you, Mary?

MARY. Oh, I'm sure he wouldn't.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Silence! [*To* HERO] Where is the ticket?

HERO. In the cloak-room of Paddington Station. In a hat-box.

CHIEF VILLAIN. The same hat-box?

HERO. Of course not. The other one was at Waterloo Station.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Well, then, where's the ticket for the hat-box in the Paddington cloak-room?

HERO. In the cloak-room at Charing Cross. In a hat-box.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*annoyed*]. Look here, how many hat-boxes have you got?

HERO. Lots.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Oh! Now let's get this straight. You say that the Rajah's Ruby is in a hat-box in the cloak-room at Paddington——

HERO. Waterloo.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Waterloo; and that the ticket for that hat-box is in a hat-box in the cloak-room at Euston——

HERO. Paddington.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Paddington; and that the ticket for this ticket, which is in a hat-box at Paddington, for the Ruby, which is in a hat-box at King's Cross——

BAD MAN. Euston.

JOHN [*tentatively*]. St Pancras?

MARY. Earl's Court?

CHIEF VILLAIN [*angrily*]. Oh, shut up! The ticket for this ticket, which is in a hat-box at Paddington, for the Ruby, which is in a hat-box at—at——

HERO. Waterloo.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Waterloo, thank you. This ticket is in a hat-box at—er——

JOHN [*with decision*]. St Pancras.

MARY [*equally certain*]. Earl's Court.

CHIEF VILLAIN. *Shut up!* In a hat-box at——

HERO. Charing Cross.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Exactly. [*Triumphantly.*] Then give me the ticket!

HERO. Which one?

CHIEF VILLAIN [*uneasily*]. The one we're talking about.

JOHN [*helpfully*]. The St Pancras one.

MARY. The Earl's Court one.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*in a fury*]. Will you shut up? [*To* HERO] Now, listen. [*Very slowly and with an enormous effort of concentration*] I want the ticket for the hat-box at Charing Cross, which contains the ticket for the hat-box at——

[JOHN's *lips indicate* "*St Pancras*" *to* MARY, *whose own seem to express a preference for Earl's Court. The* VILLAIN *gives them one look, and goes on firmly.*

—at Paddington, which contains the ticket for the hat-box at Waterloo, which contains the Rajah's Ruby. [*Proudly*] There!

HERO. I beg your pardon?

CHIEF VILLAIN [*violently*]. I will *not* say it again! Give me the ticket!

HERO [*sadly*]. I haven't got it.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*in an awestruck whisper*]. You haven't got it?

HERO. No.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*after several vain attempts to speak*]. Where is it?

HERO. In the cloak-room at Victoria Station.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*moistening his lips and speaking faintly*]. Not—not in a hat-box?

HERO. Yes.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*without much hope*]. And the ticket for that?

HERO. In the cloak-room at Euston.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*quite broken up*]. Also in a hat-box?

HERO. Yes.

CHIEF VILLAIN. How much longer do we go on?

HERO [*cheerfully*]. Oh, a long time yet.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*to* BAD MAN]. How many London stations are there?

JOHN. Well, there's St Pancras, and——

MARY. Earl's Court.

BAD MAN. About twenty big ones, governor.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Twenty! [*To* HERO] And what do we do when we've gone through the lot?

HERO. Then we go all round them again.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*anxiously*]. And—and so on?

HERO. And so on.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*his hand to his head*]. This is terrible. I must think. [*To* BAD MAN] Just torture him again while I think.

BAD MAN [*cheerfully*]. Right you are, governor. [*He approaches his victim.*]

HERO [*uneasily*]. I say, look here!

JOHN. I don't think it's quite fair, you know——

MARY [*suddenly*]. Give me back my pin!

BAD MAN. Must obey orders, gentlemen. [*Coaxingly to* HERO] Just a little way in! [*Indicating with his fingers*] That much.

JOHN [*to* MARY]. I think perhaps "that much" wouldn't matter. What do——?

CHIEF VILLAIN [*triumphantly*]. I've got it!

[*He rises with an air, the problem solved. They all look at him.*

JOHN. What?

CHIEF VILLAIN [*impressively to* HERO]. There is somewhere—logically, there must be somewhere—a final, an ultimate hat-box.

JOHN. By Jove! That's true!

HERO. Yes.

BAD MAN [*scratching his head*]. I don't see it.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Then—where *is* that hat-box?

JOHN [*cheerfully*]. St Pancras.

MARY. Earl's Court.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Shut up! [*To* HERO] Where is that hat-box?

HERO. In the cloak-room at Charing Cross.

CHIEF VILLAIN. Ah! [*He holds out his hand.*] Then give me the ticket for it.

BAD MAN [*threateningly*]. Come on now! The ticket!

HERO [*shaking his head sadly*]. I can't.

CHIEF VILLAIN [*almost inarticulate with emotion*]. You don't mean to say you've—lost—it?

HERO [*in a whisper, with bowed head*]. I've lost it.

[*With a terrible shriek the* CHIEF VILLAIN *falls back fainting into the arms of the* BAD MAN. *Instinctively* JOHN *and* MARY *embrace, sobbing to each other, "He's lost it!" The* HEROINE *rushes in, crying, "My love, you've lost it!" and puts her arms round the* HERO. *Only the* MAN IN THE

BOWLER HAT *remains unmoved. Slowly he removes the cigar from his mouth and speaks.*

BOWLER HAT. Yes. . . . That's all right. . . . Just a bit ragged still. . . . We'll take it again at eleven tomorrow. . . . Second Act, please.

[*And so the rehearsal goes on.*

THE BETRAYAL

By Padraic Colum

CHARACTERS

Gideon Lefroy, *the keeper of an inn*
Morgan Lefroy, *his brother—a magistrate*
A Bellman
Peg, *the ballad-singer*

Scene. *An inn-room in an Irish country town.*
Time. *Eighteenth century.*

Mr Padraic Colum was born in Longford, Ireland, and was one of the foundation-members of the National Theatre Society, from which the Abbey Theatre had its beginning. His first play, "The Kingdom of Youth," appeared in 1902, and his chief works are "The Land," "The Fiddler's House," and "Thomas Muskerry," all of which were written before the War.

Mr Colum is known as a realistic playwright, and he has captured something of the elusive style of the late J. M. Synge. "An air of imaginative beauty," says Professor Allardyce Nicoll in *British Drama*,[1] "passes over the whole, so that things spiritual and things material seem to meet in a common harmony. At the same time, Mr Colum's work is not by any means fanciful. His methods are at bottom as realistic as those of his contemporaries, Mr Lennox Robinson and Mr T. C. Murray."

[1] Harrap, 12*s*. 6*d*. net.

THE BETRAYAL[1]

The scene is an inn-room in a country town. It was once of some fair degree of pretension and elegance, such as might be found in some old Georgian manor fallen into evil hands and ways. The principal feature is a large window in the centre up-stage wall. This window must be of sufficient size so that outsiders can look into the room and the audience can even be allowed to see a considerable part of the outlook as well. Several references in the text, such as "down there," can be explained by raising the outer floor a distance above the street level, and adding an outer vestibule and short flight of steps, as the action of the play absolutely precludes the usual outer hallway, and also the possibility that the room could be upon the second floor of the house.

The walls should be of plaster above the wainscoting, dull, grimy, dirty, and possibly cracked and broken as well. The woodwork, once white, would now be a dirty grey, or possibly even repainted into dirty yellow brown or light green; the furniture, odds and ends, rather sparse, old oak, and the curtains should be worn, faded brown or green. The window might also be shuttered. Finally, a general dusty and vacant air should pervade the interior, and the lights should be those of late afternoon or coming dusk. The entrance is at the back. Near the entrance

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

is an upright desk. Before the window is a large table. At the back is a large sideboard.

MORGAN LEFROY, *a large, overbearing man, and his brother,* GIDEON LEFROY, *a meagre and dissatisfied-looking man, are in the room. They are regarding each other as if there were some conflict between them.*

MORGAN. Anyway, brother, I'll have my dinner here.

GIDEON. What will you have for your dinner?

MORGAN. What is there for dinner?

GIDEON. Salmon.

MORGAN. I had salmon at the bishop's yesterday, and salmon at Shirley's the day before. Is there nothing in this country but salmon?

GIDEON. There's nothing else in this house, Morgan.

MORGAN. Very well, my good brother. Let me have your salmon.

[*He sits at desk. He takes out a deck of cards and lays them before him.*

GIDEON. You must be at the cards, brother Morgan.

MORGAN. You had to be once, brother Gideon.

GIDEON. I can keep my hands off the cards now.

[*Outside the* BELLMAN'S *voice and bell are heard.*

BELLMAN. Five hundred pounds reward. Five hundred pounds reward will be given to the person or persons who will give such information as will lead to the committal of the person or persons who murdered Isaac Hackman, Sergeant in His Majesty's Army.

MORGAN. Five hundred pounds reward! Five hundred pounds reward! And no way to come by it.

GIDEON. Ah, if you could only get the reward into your hands, Morgan!

MORGAN. Your fingers, I am sure, are itching for it.

GIDEON. No more than your own, brother Morgan.

MORGAN. It's a pity we can't come to it.

[*The steps of the* BELLMAN *have been heard approaching. He comes to the door of the room ringing his bell. He comes in. He is fantastically attired, wearing the red, torn coat of a soldier, and with straw wrapped around his bare legs.*

BELLMAN. Five hundred pounds reward—for information —that will lead to the strangulation—of the person or persons who sent to damnation—Isaac Hackman—a sergeant by persuasion.

MORGAN. Your place is in the street, my man.

BELLMAN. A salmon I bear—with all my care—for Gideon Lefroy, his honour there.

[*He shows a salmon wrapped in straw.*

GIDEON. Leave it there. [*The* BELLMAN *puts the salmon down.*] Who sent you with this?

BELLMAN. A man over there—the fish made me bear.

MORGAN. I suppose he would not come in here himself when he saw that I was here.

BELLMAN. As far as I know—he would not go—when your honour was seen in the street below.

MORGAN. The people outside might think you were informing on them, eh?

BELLMAN [*at the door*]. You may drain the rivers and drag the ponds—but it's a man under bonds will put a man under bonds.

MORGAN. Come back, my man.

BELLMAN. My errand's rendered, and my duty's tendered.

[*He goes out.*

MORGAN. "The man under bonds will put another under bonds." Had he any meaning in that, Gideon?

GIDEON. No meaning at all. It's a way they have of talking. They're always saying rhymes out of old ballads.

MORGAN. Well, Maunders might as well keep the shilling

that he is paying the Bellman. The town is filled with people, but there isn't one of them that would tell who murdered the Government agent—no, not for five times five hundred pounds reward.

GIDEON. That's true. Not one of them would tell. It's their religion, you might say, not to inform on one another.

MORGAN. And so neither you nor I nor anyone else will get that five hundred pounds. I wish to Heaven I could get some of it into my hands.

GIDEON [*with an excitement that is mastering him*]. I have a way, Morgan.

MORGAN. A way of what?

GIDEON. Of getting the five hundred pounds reward.

MORGAN. What's the way? Speak out and let us hear it. Has a notion come into that narrow head of yours? Well, what's the way?

GIDEON. It is a way, I tell you. Listen, Morgan. Suppose we could get some one in the street below to come up here ; suppose one of us talked to him in full view of the crowd, he not thinking of the crowd at the time . . . Oh, but we can't get it done!

MORGAN. Go on, go on, Gideon.

GIDEON. Wouldn't they think that he was telling one of us who killed Isaac Hackman? Wouldn't they be sure to kill him when he went down amongst them? Wouldn't he know that they would be for killing him, and then . . .

MORGAN. What then?

GIDEON. Wouldn't he tell us everything—everything for the protection we could give him?

MORGAN. We could well give them the chance of seeing what's happening here. I suppose it was this gave you the idea—standing at this window and watching the street below the last day that the fair was here?

GIDEON. No, that's not the way it came into my mind. I was sitting at this table and the curtain of the window was open. A drunken peasant came up to talk to me about business. We sat down here, and were talking for a while. Suddenly the man's face went white as death. "They're watching us," he said. There was a throng at the blacksmith's forge over the way, and they were all looking into the room. I knew what the crowd had in its mind.

MORGAN. They thought that the fellow talking with you was betraying the man who murdered Isaac Hackman, eh?

GIDEON. That was it. "By my soul," said the fellow, "I was nearly turning the hands of the people against me. If it was Morgan Lefroy I was facing, I'd never leave the town alive." Well, I may say that that was what put the notion into my mind. Next day I thought it clean out.

MORGAN. Yes, it is a plan, and a good plan. Here's a room with a wide window to it. Anyone who comes here when the shutters are open must be seen by the crowd below.

GIDEON. If we could get one of them to come up here and talk to yourself privately! Every one in the fair would have their eyes on the two of you. The word would go round that the person with you was giving away the names of them that were concerned in the murder of Isaac Hackman.

MORGAN. And we know what would happen then, Gideon.

GIDEON. The people, I tell you, would become like maddened cattle. A woman would think that her brother, or son, or husband was being betrayed. God help the person that was here when they'd go down amongst the people.

MORGAN. They'd need a company of soldiers to protect them, and to get that they'd have to turn to us.

GIDEON. And we'd give them protection on condition

that they gave us the names of those concerned in the murder of Isaac Hackman.

MORGAN. Ah, it's a masterly notion, brother Gideon.

GIDEON [*flattered*]. If I was out of the bogs of Connaught I might make something of myself.

MORGAN. Yes, if you were in Dublin you might be sure of a Government post.

GIDEON. This affair might bring me into notice.

MORGAN. It might. Well, if we carry it through how much of the reward will you claim?

GIDEON. Half the five hundred pounds reward.

MORGAN. I'll give you an agent's commission.

GIDEON. That wouldn't be enough for me, brother Morgan. It was I and not you who thought of the plan.

MORGAN. That's so, that's so, brother Gideon. But you by yourself could never carry the plan out. It needs a man like me—it needs a man with the presence and the reputation of Morgan Lefroy to carry that business through. I'll play a game of cards with you. If you win—I'll make it halves.

GIDEON. I'm not like you—I can keep my hands off the cards.

MORGAN. I dare say. But then it's only a fellow like me—a fellow that takes chances and that likes taking chances—who could handle that scheme of yours. I gambled away my sinecure in Dublin Castle, and the rage for gambling hasn't abated in me.

GIDEON. Your winnings in this place won't make you popular—I'll tell you that, brother Morgan. Young Shirley came in here this morning to leave something you had won from him.

MORGAN. And did he leave it here?

[GIDEON *goes to sideboard. He takes out a sword-stick from lower part of it. He brings it to* MORGAN, *who takes it and examines it with relish.*

MORGAN. This is the sword-stick that he made such a swagger with. [*He unscrews it.*] The blade is Spanish steel. [*He leaves it on desk.*] It came to our pledging the things we boasted of—his sword-stick and my brace of bloodhounds. Now I have the sword-stick.

[*As he lays out the cards* GIDEON *is drawn to the desk almost as hypnotized. He takes up the cards that* MORGAN *deals out.*

MORGAN [*flattering* GIDEON]. As you were saying, Gideon, this affair might bring you into notice.

GIDEON. It should. There isn't one here that knows these people but myself—not one. Maunders with his shilling Bellman! Much good it will do to send that fellow through the fair!

MORGAN. No good, no good at all!

GIDEON. Maunders doesn't know them. And look at the place the Government has given him!

MORGAN. Ah, if it weren't for our scheme, brother Gideon——

GIDEON. My scheme, Morgan, my scheme.

MORGAN. So it is. It's your scheme. Aye, it's a masterly notion, brother Gideon. Did you play?

GIDEON. There's my card.

[GIDEON *wins. They play again.*

MORGAN. And there's mine. That leaves me winners, I think.

GIDEON [*scrutinizing cards*]. Aye, that leaves you winners.

MORGAN [*rising*]. Bring me the brandy.

[GIDEON *goes to sideboard, and brings bottle and glasses.* MORGAN *pours out liquor.*

MORGAN. The usual toasts! There's to the pious, glorious, and immortal memory of King William the Third!

[*He drinks.*

GIDEON. How much am I to get?

MORGAN. An agent's commission, I said.

GIDEON. And how much might your agent's commission be?

MORGAN. Fifty pounds.

GIDEON. Fifty pounds isn't enough. My notion is worth more than that.

MORGAN. I save you all the trouble and all the danger—the danger, mind you—of working your notion out.

GIDEON. Very well, then. Let us say fifty pounds for the notion. How much for the rest?

MORGAN. What are you talking about?

GIDEON. You can have my notion for fifty pounds, but you can't have anything else, brother Morgan.

MORGAN. What else can't I have? Your goodwill, eh?

GIDEON. You can't have this room, for one thing.

MORGAN. I think, brother Gideon, that you think you can play with me.

GIDEON. And do you think you can play with me? The people outside are no friends of mine. They don't give me much of their custom. But I have to live amongst them, and it wouldn't serve me if my house had the name you would put on it.

MORGAN. Gideon, you cur, don't you know that I, as magistrate, could quarter a company of soldiers on you that would eat you bare as bones?

GIDEON. Could the like of that be done on a loyal man?

MORGAN. It could, and I'm the man to have it done.

GIDEON. Very well, then. You can have what you want. But what are we talking about, anyway? None of the men in the street will come up in this room when they know that you are in the place.

MORGAN. I have luck, I tell you, I have luck.

[*There is a knock at the door.*

GIDEON. It must be some one from the street. No one else knocks.

MORGAN. Open the door, Gideon.

GIDEON. Your luck is not for to-day, Morgan.

MORGAN. Open the door.

[GIDEON *opens the door. A woman of about sixty is seen waiting there. She is barefooted, and she wears the enveloping cloak that women in parts of Connaught still wear. She is agitated, but there is something stately in her bearing.*

GIDEON. Who are you?

PEG. They call me Peg the Ballad-singer.

GIDEON. What have you come here for?

PEG. To speak with his honour, Mr Morgan Lefroy.

MORGAN. And what can I do for you, Peg the Ballad-singer?

PEG. I ran beside your horse when your honour was going to a meeting of the magistrates, and your honour made a promise to me.

MORGAN. And what promise did I make to you?

PEG. Your honour promised that you would see me in this place and on this day.

MORGAN. I did, eh? That's something I hadn't thought of. Well, here I am. Here I am and here you are, Peg. [*He makes a motion indicating the whole of the room.*] And I'll talk to you here, and I'll listen to what you have to say.

PEG. Your honour's over-good to a poor woman.

MORGAN. Do you hear what she says, Gideon?

GIDEON [*at the table beside him*]. You'll be brought down, you'll be brought down, Morgan.

[*He drinks brandy from glass and bottle left on table.*

MORGAN. Dinner in an hour, Gideon. And mind how you treat me. It will be to your peril if you do not serve

me to my liking. But first go down and give the people outside the messages that I spoke to you about before, the messages that I want delivered to them.

[GIDEON *drinks more brandy, then goes out of door. His voice is heard speaking, as* MORGAN *opens shutters of window and stands in view of the people outside.*

GIDEON'S VOICE. Mr Morgan Lefroy is here, and he bids me tell the people from Nobber that he is making a new avenue to his house, and he orders the people to send round horses and men for the work, as is their duty.

MORGAN. An old woman out there says that hell gapes for me. I know her. She always says that. And just because her son was amongst the batch I got transported.

[*From the moment of the woman's entrance* MORGAN LEFROY'S *manner has changed; he is no longer violent; he is alert and careful.*

MORGAN [*to* PEG]. Well, here I am, my good woman. And what have you to say to me?

PEG. My son! I come to you about my son.

MORGAN. And what do you want me to do about your son?

PEG. My son is in gaol. Oh, if your honour will not speak for him, he will be shot down to-morrow or the day after!

MORGAN. And why will your son be shot down?

PEG. First he listed, and then he ran away from the soldiers.

MORGAN. He deserted, is that what he did? Deserted from the King's Army?

PEG. You might say that, your honour.

MORGAN. And you want me to do something for him?

PEG. To write a letter to the Colonel for him, for my son Terence. Oh, if your honour would only do that!

MORGAN. Is there anyone who would speak for him?

PEG [*eagerly*]. Outside, it is, your honour?

MORGAN. Aye, outside. [PEG *goes to the window.*

PEG. There's a crowd at the blacksmith's forge, and every one in it could speak for him and for me.

MORGAN. Give me their names.

PEG. Is it the names of the people outside, the people who would speak for my son and myself?

MORGAN. Aye. Give me their names. The names! I will write them down. For the letter that I am to send to Colonel Maunders.

PEG. There's Mainey Kelly, Cormac Farragher, Shaun O'Gorman, Hugh O'Keefe. [*She turns, and notices the way he is watching her.*] Oh, your honour, sure you intend no harm to me?

MORGAN. No, no. What harm could I mean for you? Give me the names again, and I will write them down. Else there will be no use in your taking this letter to Colonel Maunders.

PEG. Mainey Kelly, Cormac Farragher, Shaun O'Gorman. A woman has gone down on her knees. It's Mary Sullivan. She is praying that I may win the life of my son.

MORGAN. Let that be as it may. I have the names down that you gave me. And now I want to ask you something.

PEG. What is it, your honour?

MORGAN. You know everything that the people outside know?

PEG. I do, your honour. And more than they know. More, more!

MORGAN. What more do you know?

PEG. Something that was handed down to me by my father, and from his father's father.

MORGAN. And what is that?

PEG. The knowledge that there was once learning in Nobber, and the way of showing that there was.

MORGAN. Learning! In Nobber! Well, well. Why didn't they take the trouble of handing you down knowledge of something that was worth while?

PEG. Your honour wouldn't care about the learning that the people had, why would you? But my father and his father's father cared about it. There were books in their keeping. And when the last book was gone my father made me learn——

MORGAN. I hope it was a way to come to hidden gold.

PEG. No, your honour. Nothing like that. Only an old ancient poem that was made by a queen in the old days in Ireland.

MORGAN. You can say it for me. Come, let me hear it.

PEG. Queen Gormlai was her name, and, like many another, she came to poverty.

MORGAN. Stand this way and say it for me.

[*He motions* PEG *to come to a place where she can be seen from the street. At first* PEG *speaks the verse diffidently. Then the situation in the poem dominates her and controls her agitation.*

PEG. The Queen said:

"Unseemly is the rag
That's for my back to-day:
Patched and double-patched—
The hodden on the grey.
. . . . .
Here, here, I am begrudged
Even the candle's light
To put it on, the garb
That leaves me misbedight.

O skinflint woman, Mor,
  Who knows that I speak true—
I had women once—
  A queen's retinue!

Light of hand and apt,
  And companionable:
Seven score women, Mor,
  I had at my call.
. . . . .
Now this old clout to wear,
  With root-like stitches through—
Not hands that worked for queens,
  Nor fine things felt made you!

The bramble is no friend,
  It pulls at me and drags;
This thorny ground is mine,
  Where briers tear my rags!"

MORGAN. So that is what was given to you to remember?

PEG. To show that there was once learning in Nobber, your honour.

MORGAN. Well, there was an old poem handed down to me too, from my father and my father's father:

" There was an old prophecy found in a bog,
    Lillubollero O!
  There was an old prophecy found in a bog,
  That Ireland would be ruled by an ass and a dog,
    Lillubollero O! "

[*At these words from the song of a dominating party* PEG THE BALLAD-SINGER *bends her knees.*

MORGAN. I know no more of it than that. Well, we'll

get to our business. So the people outside will speak for you, eh? For you and your son?

PEG. They will, your honour, and be glad to do it, and they would be proud that their words were taken by your honour.

MORGAN [*at the window*]. But they are all looking at you very strangely, Peg.

PEG. Is the sight of a woman begging for the life of the one nearest to her so strange to them?

MORGAN. That woman is not praying—she is cursing.

PEG. And there's another woman on her knees. God help me that has to beg my son's life from a man cursed by the people!

MORGAN. You think that it is me that they are cursing. You are mistaken. It is you that the people outside are cursing.

PEG. Me! But how can that be?

MORGAN. I don't know what has happened. But I know that you daren't go out amongst them now.

PEG. What happened? What happened to make them like this?

MORGAN. I know. I know now what has happened.

PEG. Tell me. Oh, your honour, tell me!

MORGAN. This is it. Seeing you with me, seeing you talking to me so familiarly, they think . . . Blood and 'ouns! Don't you know what they think?

PEG. No, no, your honour. Tell me!

MORGAN. They think—and how easy it is for them to think it—they think that you have been giving me the names of those who killed Isaac Hackman!

PEG. My God, my God!

[*She goes to the window as if to address frantically the people outside. But the sight of them strikes her dumb. She cowers at the window.* GIDEON LEFROY *opens small door, L., and rushes over to the table where his brother is standing.*

GIDEON. Brother Morgan!

MORGAN. What are you here for, Gideon?

GIDEON. For judgment upon you because of your unrighteous dealing.

MORGAN. You have been filling that dry skin of yours with your righteous brandy.

GIDEON. I know that your iniquity is as a winter's night, dark and terrible. Thou art hardened in thine iniquity. Thine iniquity is as brass hardened in the workshop; yea, thou art all brass, and as brass thou shalt be broken up, and not left standing any more. I have been moved to say this to you.

MORGAN. Be off!

GIDEON. The mouth that has filled itself with curses shall be silenced, Morgan.

MORGAN. What do you want? Tell me and get out of this.

GIDEON. Art thou sober, Morgan?

MORGAN. More sober than you are, you canting dog!

[MORGAN *takes up the sword-stick as if to strike him with it.*

GIDEON. Yes, Morgan, you hold the rod of your iniquity before me. This is it, this that you boast of for a sword-stick! Where did it come from? You boast that you won it in your gambling riotings. You staked a brace of bloodhounds against it. Now will your iniquity be established. They were by a dog——

MORGAN. Out of this or I'll hurt you—I will, by God!

GIDEON. Hurt me as well as rob me, aye, you would do that, Morgan. I ask you where the dog came from that that litter was by? He was here—I fed him here. I brought bones to that bloodhound, Morgan Lefroy. And who ever paid me for the nourishing of that dog? Not you, brother Morgan.

[*Suddenly he puts his hands on the sword-stick and wrests it from* MORGAN, *and holds it in a way that shows he can be dangerous.*

MORGAN. You'd be dangerous, would you? I'll show you that I can be dangerous too.

[*He quickly draws a dagger from inside his coat.*

GIDEON. Half, do you hear? I won't be cheated by you. I won't! I won't! I'll have it, I'll have it, I say.

[*He goes to door to vestibule.* MORGAN *follows him. The door is slammed in* MORGAN'S *face. He returns to desk after slight pause at door. Holds dagger in his hand; pauses at desk; looks at dagger; takes it in left hand; leans hand holding dagger on desk; suddenly decides to follow* GIDEON, *and starts for door, leaving dagger on desk.* PEG THE BALLAD-SINGER *has been crouching by the window, not giving attention to the scene between the brothers.*

PEG. Me to be condemned by the people, me that lay by their fires and ate the bit they gave me! Oh, the way they look at the house that I'm in! The way they look at it!

[*She comes to* MORGAN LEFROY *as he is half-way to door. She is between him and the desk.*

PEG. Oh, your honour, save me! Save me from those that have their eyes upon me.

MORGAN. Well, my good woman, I'll try to do that. I might have a regiment of soldiers brought to the town.

PEG. Oh, and would you let me be with the soldiers?

MORGAN. I might do that. And I could have you taken to the house of a magistrate where you would be safe.

PEG. Do that, your honour, and all my life I will pray for you.

MORGAN. Then you could be put on board of a ship and brought to another part of the country—to a part where the people would not know you.

PEG. Could I get to such a place?

MORGAN. You could. It will be done.

PEG. And my son? Oh, what will happen to Terence?

MORGAN. Your son too I'll look after. I will have him set at liberty. Indeed, he'll be in any part of the country that you want to stay in. I will get him a place in a gentleman's house, and you two can be together, safe and secure.

PEG. They told me you were hard and grinding to the people. Wasn't it well I didn't believe that! On my knees I thank you, and I pray for you.

MORGAN. Hush, my good woman; I'll do all I said for you.

PEG. The blessing of the poor and the shelterless be upon you. . . . But they . . . they'll think that I have betrayed the people.

MORGAN. It can't be helped. You'll have the name for that.

PEG. The name for that! That I betrayed the people! And I sat by their fires and lay in their houses!

MORGAN. It can't be helped, Peg. You'll have the name for having betrayed them, as they call it. Well, did you ever hear that it was as well to have the blame as the name?

PEG. What meaning is there in that?

MORGAN. This meaning, Peg. That as you have and will always have the name for having betrayed the people you might as well have the blame as well. Oh, yes, you might as well have the blame. Nothing will clear you in the minds of the people outside. Well, then, come on and tell me who it was killed Isaac Hackman?

PEG. I haven't said it! Not a word has passed my lips!

MORGAN. For them down there, every word has passed your lips. Come now and tell me. Who was it did it?

PEG. How could I tell you that? I never could name those names!

MORGAN. They believe you have told. They blame you for telling. Aye, and they will kill you for telling. A stone smashing your head, another stone breaking your neck, and then you'll be left lying in a ditch! Go out amongst them and that is what you will get. You'll be left lying there, and there will be no word more about you. You know that. Sentence has been passed on you for doing a thing. Now do it—do it to save yourself. Who was it killed Isaac Hackman?

PEG. I can't, I can't. No matter what befalls me I can't do that!

MORGAN. I have told you what I'll do for you. I'll summon a regiment of soldiers to the town. I'll have you taken to the house of a magistrate where you will be safe. Then you will be put on board of a ship and brought to a part of the country where no one will know anything about you, will not know what you have the name of being or the blame of doing. Are you listening to me? What else will you ask? I'll do everything else to save and shield you. All I want you to do is to give me the names that you are blamed already for giving me.

PEG. It was never in me to do that.

MORGAN. Then will you go amongst the people outside?

PEG. They would destroy me, they would destroy me! Save me, your honour, save me!

MORGAN. What will you do to save yourself?

PEG. Anything, your honour, anything!

MORGAN. Then give me the names of the people concerned in the murder of Isaac Hackman!

PEG [*backing away from him*]. Their names will never cross these lips of mine.

MORGAN. Give me the names, or I'll have you thrown into the street amongst the people that will destroy you.

[*He crowds her until she is against desk. She stands with her back to it, her hands on the desk for support.*

PEG. No. Look at me as you like, but you will see that I am not going to do that. Ah, I was foolish to think that you had any wish for my son. For what wish could you have for the people? And what could be between you and them but hatred and broken trust? Why did I come here at all? Ah, you planned to bring me here so that the people might see me here with you and think that I had betrayed them! Ah, you planned it, and you planned it well, and you have taken me like the bird under the crib!

MORGAN. Yes, you are like the bird under the crib, and there's no way out for you. There's nothing that you can do now; there's nothing that you can do.

PEG. Nothing that I can do, nothing that I can do!

[*Feeling for support on desk, her hands come into contact with dagger.*

MORGAN. They're shouting something. What is it all about?

[*He goes to window.* PEG *takes up dagger. She holds it as if it were something marvellous that had been put into her hands. She crosses to L.*

PEG. What did you want of me?

MORGAN. The people who murdered Isaac Hackman will be taken soon. You and no one else will be blamed for their betrayal. Nothing will clear you. Well, take the only thing you can get—safety—and take it from me. Give me the names of the people who did the murder, and

claim protection. Speak to me. Was it Mary Sullivan's son? Was it Honor Gowan's brother?

[PEG *does not speak.*

MORGAN. Something has come into the street. I can't understand what it is. You can hear them. Tell me what they are saying? [*He turns to window again.*

PEG. Kill, kill, kill! That's what the people are saying. And can't you hear something from the blacksmith's forge? Strike! Strike! It tells that there are strokes prepared for the one who betrays the people. Strike! Strike! Strike! Oh, it can't be for me that the strokes are!

[*She goes toward* MORGAN LEFROY, *whose back is turned. She goes slowly, holding dagger. As he is about to turn she stabs him in the neck.* MORGAN LEFROY *falls.*

PEG. There he lies, the man who would have betrayed us all! Now I can walk amongst the people, for I have saved them. And if my son meets his death he can die without shame, for none of his race ever betrayed the people!

[*The window is opened from the outside. The* BELLMAN *is seen holding himself against the window.*

BELLMAN. The curse of the people on you and your race!

PEG. I have saved the people.

BELLMAN. The man under bonds has put others under bonds. To save his own breast from the bullet he made known the names of them that destroyed that tormentor—Isaac Hackman. Your son has betrayed the people!

PEG. O Mother of All Affliction!

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

By Lord Dunsany

CHARACTERS

The Prince of Zoon
Prince Meliflor
Queen Zoomzoomarma
Lady Oozizi
Oomuz, *a common soldier*
The Glory of Ximenung
The Overlord of Moomoomon
Prince Huz

Lord Dunsany's plays have been included in the first and third series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*, and it is hardly necessary to repeat what was said in the notes in those two volumes. "The Flight of the Queen" is an exquisitely beautiful play, the theme being taken from the nuptial flight of the queen bee. The author found drama in the insect-world and translated it into human terms, but (unlike most other writers on similar themes) he made no attempt to point a moral or to teach in parables. There is no other play which has the least resemblance to "The Flight of the Queen"; Lord Dunsany is inimitable.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN[1]

Scene I

Time: *June.*

Scene: *In the Palace of Zoorm; the Hall of the Hundred Princes.*

The Princes sit at plain oaken tables with pewter mugs before them. They wear bright grass-green cloaks of silk; they might wear circlets of narrow silver with one large hyacinth petal rising from it at intervals of an inch.

oomuz, *a common soldier, huge and squat, with brown skin and dense black beard, stands just inside the doorway, holding a pike, guarding the golden treasure.*

The golden treasure lies in a heap three or four feet high near the right back corner.

sentries, *also brown-skinned and bearded, carrying pikes, pass and repass outside the great doorway.*

the glory of ximenung. Heigho, Moomoomon!

the overlord of moomoomon. Heigho, Glory of Ximenung!

ximenung. Weary?

moomoomon. Aye, weary.

another. Heigho!

prince meliflor [*sympathetically*]. What wearies you?

[1] Published by Messrs G. P. Putnam's Sons (paper covers, 1s. net). Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

MOOMOOMON. The idle hours and the idle days. Heigho!

OTHERS. Heigho!

MELIFLOR. Speak not against the idle hours, Moomoomon.

MOOMOOMON. Why, then, lord of the sweet lands?

MELIFLOR. Because in idleness are all things, all things good.

XIMENUNG. Heigho, I am weary of the idle hours!

MOOMOOMON. You would work then?

XIMENUNG. No-o. That is not our destiny.

MELIFLOR. Let us be well contented with our lot. The idle hours are our sacred treasure.

XIMENUNG. Yes, I am well contented, and yet . . .

MOOMOOMON [*contemplatively*]. And yet . . .

XIMENUNG. I sometimes dream that were it not for our glorious state, and this tradition of exalted ease, it might, it might be pleasant . . .

MOOMOOMON. To toil, to labour, to raid the golden hoards.

XIMENUNG. Yes, Moomoomon.

MELIFLOR. Never! Never!

OTHERS. No. No. No.

ANOTHER. And yet . . .

MELIFLOR. No, never. We should lose our glorious ease, the heritage that none may question.

XIMENUNG. What heritage is that, Prince Meliflor?

MELIFLOR. It is all the earth. To labour is to lose it.

MOOMOOMON. If we could toil we should gain some spot of earth that our labour would seem to make our own. How happily the workers come home at evening!

MELIFLOR. It would be to lose all.

PRINCE OF ZOON. How lose it, Meliflor?

MELIFLOR. To us alone the idle hours are given. The sky, the fields, the woods, the summer winds are for us

alone. All others put the earth to uses. This or that field has this or that use; here one may go and another may not. They have each their bit of earth and become slaves to its purpose. But for us, ah! for us, is all; the gift of the idle hours.

SOME. Hurrah! Hurrah for the idle hours!

ZOON. Heigho! The idle hours weary me.

MELIFLOR. They give us all the earth and sky to contemplate. Both are for us.

MOOMOOMON. True. Let us drink, and speak of the blue sky.

MELIFLOR [*lifting mug*]. And all our glorious heritage.

XIMENUNG [*putting hand to mug*]. Aye, it is glorious, and yet . . .

[*Enter the Raiders of the Golden Hoard with spears and, in the other hand, leather wallets the size of your fist; these they cast on the heap. Nuggets the size of big filberts escape from some, so that the heap is partly leather and partly gold. These wallets should be filled with nuggets of lead, about the size described, not one lump of lead and not sawdust or rags. Nothing destroys illusion on the stage more than a cannon-ball falling with a soft pat. They look scowlingly at the Princes.*

[*Exeunt the Raiders. The Princes have scarcely noticed them.*

MELIFLOR. See how they waste the hours.

XIMENUNG. They have brought treasure from the Golden Hoard.

ZOON. Yes, from the Golden Hoard beyond the marshes. I went there once with old brown Oomuz there.

MELIFLOR. Of what avail is it to come back burdened thus? Has not the Queen more wealth than she'll ever need?

MOOMOOMON. Aye, the Queen needs nothing more.

ZOON. How can we know that?

MOOMOOMON. Why not?

ZOON. The Queen obeys old impulses. Her sires are dead. Who knows whence those impulses come? How can we say what they are?

MOOMOOMON. She cannot need more wealth than what is here.

MELIFLOR. No, no, she cannot.

ZOON. She needs more, for she has bidden them go again to the Golden Hoards. Her impulses have demanded it.

MOOMOOMON. Then there is no reason in her impulses.

ZOON. They do not come from reason.

MOOMOOMON. So I said.

ZOON. They come from Fate.

MOOMOOMON. From Fate!

[*There is a hush at this.* OOMUZ *comes nearer and kneels down.*

OOMUZ. Oh, masters, masters. If there be anything greater, greater than the Queen, speak not of it, masters, speak not its name.

ZOON. No, Oomuz. We need nothing greater.

OOMUZ. The name frightened me, Mighty Highness.

ZOON. Yes, yes, Oomuz; there is only the Queen.

MOOMOOMON. No, there is nothing greater than the Queen, and she has no need of anything more than the treasure that he guards there.

OOMUZ. There is one thing more.

MOOMOOMON. More? What is that?

OOMUZ. There is one thing more. The Queen needs one thing more. This has been told us and we know.

MOOMOOMON. What is it?

OOMUZ. How should we know that? None knows the need of the Queen. [OOMUZ *returns to guard his heap.*

ZOON. What think you, Oomuz? What think you is this need of the Queen?

[OOMUZ *shakes his head about three times.* PRINCE OF ZOON *sighs.*

SEVERAL PRINCES [*together wearily*]. Heigho!

MELIFLOR. Take comfort in our heritage, illustrious comrades. Come! We will drink to the sun.

SOME. To the sun! To the sun! [*They drink.*]

MELIFLOR. To the golden idle hours! [*He drinks.*] Let us be worthy, glorious companions, of our exalted calling. Let us enjoy the days of idleness. Sing to us, mighty one of Zoon, as the idle hours go by. Sing us a song.

MOOMOOMON [*idly*]. Yes, sing to us.

ZOON. As you all know, I can but hum. But I will hum you a song that I heard yesterday; very strange it was; sung in the meadows by two that were not of our people; sung in the evening. I heard it as I loitered home from the meadows beyond the marshes. There is no ease in the song, and yet . . .

MOOMOOMON. Hum it to us.

ZOON. They sang it together, the two that were not of our people.

[*He hums a song. They all lift up their heads from their listlessness.*

MELIFLOR [*wonderingly*]. That is a song that is new.

ZOON. Yes, it is new to me.

MELIFLOR. It is like an old song.

ZOON. Yes, perhaps it is old.

MELIFLOR. What is the song?

ZOON. It tells of love.

THE PRINCES. Ah-h!

[*They seem to wake as though young and strong out of sleep. There is a great commotion among them. The sentries outside are utterly unmoved.* OOMUZ,

without sharing any of the excitement of the Princes, now nods his head solemnly as he had once shaken it.

MOOMOOMON. Love! It must have been that that I felt that day in the twilight as I came back round the peak of Zing-gee Mountain.

XIMENUNG. You felt it, Moomoomon? Tell us.

MOOMOOMON. All the air seemed gold, seemed gold of a sudden. Through it I saw fair fields, glittering green far down, glimpsed between clumps of the heather. The gold was all about them, yet they shone with their own fair colours. Ah, how can I tell you all I saw? My feet seemed scarce to touch the slope of the mountain; I too seemed one with the golden air in which all things were shining.

XIMENUNG. And this was love?

MOOMOOMON. I know not. It was some strange new thing. It was strange and new like this song.

MELIFLOR. Perhaps it was some other strange new thing.

MOOMOOMON. Perhaps. I know not.

ZOON. No. It was love.

MOOMOOMON. And then that evening in the golden light I knew the purpose of earth and why all things are.

XIMENUNG. What is the purpose, Moomoomon?

MOOMOOMON. I know not. I was content. I troubled not to remember.

ZOON. It was love.

XIMENUNG. Let us love.

OTHERS. Aye.

HUZ. Aye, that is best of all.

MELIFLOR. No, Princes. The best is idleness. Out of the idle hours all good things come.

HUZ. I will love. That is best.

MELIFLOR. It is like all things, the gift of the idle hours. The workers never love. Their fancies are fastened to the work they do, and do not roam towards love.

ALL. Love! Let us love.

MELIFLOR. We will love in idleness and praise the idle hours.

XIMENUNG. Whom will you love, lord of the shimmering fields?

MELIFLOR. I have but to show myself loitering by lanes in the evening.

XIMENUNG. I too will be there.

MELIFLOR. And when they see me . . .

XIMENUNG. They will see me too . . .

MELIFLOR [*rising*]. Behold me.

XIMENUNG. So I do.

MELIFLOR. Will they look towards you when this is there?

XIMENUNG. Are birch-trees seen at dawn fairer than I?

MELIFLOR. Behold me; not a poplar is straighter, not a flower is fairer. I will loiter along the lanes at evening.

[*He draws his sword.* XIMENUNG *does the same.* MOOMOOMON *draws his too, and places it between them.*

MOOMOOMON. Be at peace. *I* will go to the lanes, and there need be no quarrel between you, for *I* . . .

OTHERS. No, no, no. . . .

HUZ. We will all go.

ANOTHER. We will all love. Hurrah for love!

[*They have all risen. They wave their swords on high, not threatening each other.* ZOON *alone has not risen.*

MOOMOOMON [*to* ZOON]. You do not speak, Prince of Zoon. Will you not love along the idle hours?

ZOON. Yes, yes. I love.

MOOMOOMON. Come, then, to the lanes to loiter. It draws towards evening. Let us all come to the lanes, where the honeysuckle is hanging.

ZOON. I love not in the lanes.

MOOMOOMON. Not in the lanes? Then . . .!

OTHERS. Not in the lanes?

ZOON. I love her than whom there is no greater on earth —[SOME PRINCES: "*Ah!*"] unless it be that name that frightens Oomuz.

MOOMOOMON. He loves the . . .!

XIMENUNG. The . . .

MELIFLOR. The Queen! [OOMUZ *nods his head again.*

ZOON. The Queen.

MOOMOOMON. If the Queen knew such a thing she would flee from the palace.

ZOON. I would pursue.

MOOMOOMON. She would go by Æther Mountain, where her mother went once before her.

ZOON. I would follow.

HUZ. We would all follow.

MELIFLOR. I would follow too. I would dance after her down the little street; the bright heels of my shoes would twinkle; my cloak would float out behind me; I would pursue her and call her name, beyond the street and over the moor as far as Æther Mountain; but I would not come up with her; that would be *too* daring.

ZOON. Love is not a toy, Prince Meliflor. Love is no less than a mood of Destiny.

MELIFLOR. Pooh! We must enjoy the idle hours that are for us alone.

ZOON. There will be no idle hours on Æther Mountain, following from crag to crag; if it be true that she would go that way.

MOOMOOMON. It is true. They know it. They say her

mother went that way before. It is one of the royal impulses.

ZOON. Oomuz, did the mother of the Queen go once up Æther Mountain?

OOMUZ. Aye, and *her* mother.

ZOON. It is true.

XIMENUNG. You are sure of this?

OOMUZ. We know it. It has been said.

HUZ. We will all follow her up Æther Mountain.

MELIFLOR. We will follow merrily.

XIMENUNG. If we did this what would they do when we returned?

MELIFLOR. Who?

XIMENUNG. They.

MELIFLOR. They? They would not dare to speak to *us*.

XIMENUNG. Who knows what they would dare if we dared to go after the Queen?

MOOMOOMON. They would dare nothing, knowing whence we come.

XIMENUNG. They care not whence we come.

MOOMOOMON. But they care for the event that is in our hands. They dare never touch us because of the event.

MELIFLOR. We are the heirs of the idle hours. For them is work. Surely they dare not leave their work to touch us.

MOOMOOMON. They care only for the event. Because it is prophesied that we are needed for the event we are sacred. Were it not for the event, why . . .

MELIFLOR. Were it not for the event we might not dare to do it; but, being sacred, let us enjoy our idle hours.

XIMENUNG. What if the event should one day befall?

MELIFLOR. It was prophesied long ago and has not come. It will not come for a long time.

MOOMOOMON. No, not for a long time. [*A sentry passes.*

MELIFLOR. So we will follow the Queen.

HUZ. Yes, we will follow.

MOOMOOMON. We shall be a merry company.

MELIFLOR. Splendid to see.

ZOON. I would follow, though I were not guarded for the event. Though the event should befall and we be immune no longer, still I should dare it.

MELIFLOR. I would dare it if I knew what they would do. But knowing not . . .

MOOMOOMON. What matter? We are guarded by the event.

ZOON. I say I care not.

MELIFLOR. Let us drum with our heels and beat with our scabbards against the benches so that we frighten the Queen. She will run from the palace then, and we will go after her with all our merry company.

MOOMOOMON. Yes, let us drum all together. I will give the word. All together, and she will run from the palace. We will go after, and our cloaks will stream behind us.

HUZ. Brave! And our scabbards will show bright beneath them.

MELIFLOR. No, I will give the word. When she flees from the palace I will follow her first. Crowd not about my cloak as it streams in the wind. We must throw up our heels as we run to make our shoes twinkle. We must show gaily in the little street. Afterwards we can run more easily.

HUZ. Aye, in the street we must run beautifully.

MOOMOOMON. I think that I should give the word when we rattle our scabbards and all drum with our heels; but I waive the point. But I do not think that the Queen can run far. She has never left the palace. How could she run over the moor as far as Æther Mountain? She will faint at the end of the street, and we shall come up with her and bow and offer her our assistance.

MELIFLOR. Good, good. It would be cold and rocky on Æther Mountain.

MOOMOOMON. The Queen could never go there over the moor.

HUZ. No, she is too dainty.

XIMENUNG. They say she could.

MELIFLOR. They; what do they know? Common workers. What should they know of queens?

XIMENUNG. They have the old prophecies that came over the fields from the dawn.

MELIFLOR. Yet they cannot understand the Queen.

XIMENUNG. They say her mother went there.

MELIFLOR. That was long ago. Women are quite different now.

XIMENUNG. Well, give the word.

MELIFLOR. Nay. You shall give the word, Moomoomon. When you raise your hand we will all drum with our heels together and rattle our scabbards together, and frighten the Queen.

MOOMOOMON. I honour your courtesy, lord of the deep meadows.

MELIFLOR. We are ready, then. When you raise your hand . . .

[*A gust of laughter is heard off, from a far part of the palace.*

MOOMOOMON. Hark! Hark!

MELIFLOR. It is the Queen! She laughed.

HUZ. Could she have guessed . . .?

MOOMOOMON. I trust not.

MELIFLOR. She—she—cannot have been thinking of *us*.

MOOMOOMON. She—she—seldom laughs.

HUZ. What can it be?

MOOMOOMON. Perhaps it was nothing, and yet . . .

MELIFLOR. Yet it makes me uneasy.

MOOMOOMON. It is not that I fear, but when a queen laughs—it makes a feeling in the palace—as though all were not well.

HUZ. It makes one have forebodings. One cannot help it.

MELIFLOR. Perhaps; perhaps later we could return to our gallant scheme; for the present I think I'll hide a while.

MOOMOOMON. Yes, let us hide.

MELIFLOR. So that if there be anything wrong in the palace it will not find us.

[*Exeunt* MOOMOOMON *and* MELIFLOR.

HUZ. Let us hide. [*Exeunt all but* ZOON *and* OOMUZ.

[ZOON *has sat always with bent head at table. He sits so, still.*

ZOON [*bitterly*]. They would follow the Queen.

OOMUZ. Mighty Highness——

ZOON [*still to himself*]. They will come back boasting that they dared follow the Queen.

OOMUZ. Mighty Highness.

ZOON. Yes, good Oomuz.

OOMUZ. In other times once princes followed a queen and came back boasting. Master, the workers were angry. Be warned, master, because you and I went together once to the Hoard beyond the marshes. Be warned. They were angry, master.

ZOON. I care not for the workers.

OOMUZ. Master, be warned. It was long ago, and they say they were very angry.

ZOON. I care not, Oomuz. I come not boasting back from the hills under Æther Mountain. I shall not halt till I have told the Queen my love. I shall wed with her who is less only than Fate, if less she be. I am not as those, Oomuz. Who weds the Queen is more than the servant of Fate.

OOMUZ. Master——

[*He stretches out his hands towards* ZOON *imploringly.*

ZOON. Well, Oomuz?

OOMUZ. Master, there is a doom about the Queen.

ZOON. What doom, Oomuz?

OOMUZ. We know not, master. We are simple people and we know not that. But we know from of old there is a doom about her. We know it, master; we have been told from of old.

ZOON. Yes, there could well be a doom about the Queen.

OOMUZ. Follow not after, master, when she goes to Æther Mountain. There is surely a doom about her. A doom was with her mother upon that very peak.

ZOON. Yes, Oomuz, a doom well becomes her.

OOMUZ. Doubt it not, master; there is a doom about her.

ZOON. Oomuz, I doubt not. For there is something wonderful about the Queen, beyond all earthly wonders. Something like thunder beyond far clouds or hail hurling from heaven; there should be indeed a terrible doom about her.

OOMUZ. Master, I have warned you for the sake of the days when we raided the Golden Hoard beyond the marshes.

ZOON [*taking his hand*]. Thank you, good Oomuz.

[*He goes towards door after the others.*

OOMUZ. But where go you, master?

ZOON. I wait to follow the Queen when she goes to Æther Mountain.

[*Exit.* OOMUZ *weeps silently on to the Queen's Treasure.*

CURTAIN

Scene II

The Palace of Zoorm; the Hall of Queen Zoomzoomarma.
Time: *Same as Scene I.*

QUEEN. Is none worthy to kiss my hand, Oozizi; none?

LADY OOZIZI. Lady, none. [*The* QUEEN *sighs.*
You should not sigh, great lady.

QUEEN. Why should I not sigh, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. Great lady, because such things as sighs pertain only to love.

QUEEN. Love is a joy, Oozizi; love is a glow. Love makes them dance so lightly along rays of the sunlight. It is made of sunlight and gladness. It is like flowers in twilight. How should they sigh?

OOZIZI. Lady! Great lady! Say not such things of love!

QUEEN. Say not such things, Oozizi? Are they not true?

OOZIZI. True? Yes, great lady, true. But love is a toy of the humble; love is a common thing that the lowly use; love is . . . Great lady, had any overheard you speaking then they might have thought, they might have madly dreamed . . .

QUEEN. Dreamed what, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. Incredible things.

QUEEN [*meditatively*]. I must not love, Oozizi.

OOZIZI. Lady! The common people love.

[*She points to door.*
Lady, the green fields going from here to the blueness, and bending towards it, and going wandering on, and the rivers they meet and the woods that shade the rivers, all own you for their sovereign. Lady, a million lime-trees mellow your realm. The golden hoards are yours. Yours are the deep fields and the iris marshes. Yours are the roads of

wandering and all ways home. The common delights of love your mere soldiers know. Lady, you may not love.

[*The* QUEEN *sighs.* OOZIZI *continues her knitting.*

QUEEN. My mother loved, Oozizi.

OOZIZI. Lady, for a day. For one day, mighty lady. As one might stoop in idleness to a broken toy and pick it up and throw it again away, so she loved for a day. That idle fancy of an afternoon tarnished no pinnacle that shone from her exalted station. But to love for more than a day—[QUEEN's *face lights up*]—that were to place your high unequalled glory below a vulgar pastime. One alone may sit in the golden palace to reign over the green fields; but all may love.

QUEEN. Do all love but I, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. Wondrous many, lady.

QUEEN. How know you, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. The common shouts that come up at evening, the clamour of the lanes; they are but from love.

QUEEN. What is love, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. Love is a foolish thing.

QUEEN. How know you, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. They came tittering to me once; but I saw the foolishness of it.

QUEEN [*a little sadly*]. And they came no more?

OOZIZI [*a little sadly too*]. No more.

[*Both look thoughtfully out into dreams, the* QUEEN *on her throne, chin on hand.*

[*Suddenly a stir is heard from the Hall of the Hundred Princes.*

QUEEN [*alarmed*]. Hark! What was that?

OOZIZI [*rises, listening anxiously*]. It sounded . . . to come from the Hall . . . of the Hundred Princes.

QUEEN. They were never heard here before.

OOZIZI. Lady, never.

QUEEN [*anxiously*]. What can it mean?

OOZIZI. I know not, lady.

QUEEN. Sound never troubled our inner chamber before.

OOZIZI. All is quiet now.

QUEEN. Hark! [*They listen.*

OOZIZI. All is quiet.

QUEEN. Sound from beyond our wall, Oozizi. How it disturbs! I could not rule over the green fields if sounds came up to me from the farther halls full of their strange thoughts. Why do sounds come to me, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. Great lady, it has never been before. It will never be again. You must forget it, lady. You must not let it disturb your reign.

QUEEN. It brought strange thoughts with it, Oozizi.

OOZIZI. All is quiet now.

QUEEN. If it came again . . .

OOZIZI. Lady, it will not come again. It will come no more. It is quiet.

QUEEN. If it came again . . . Is the door open, Oozizi? Yes. . . . If it came again I should almost flee from the palace.

OOZIZI. Lady! Think not of leaving the golden palace!

QUEEN. If it came again.

OOZIZI. It will not come again.

[*The heels of the Princes drum louder, off.*

QUEEN. Again, Oozizi!

[OOZIZI *pants. The* QUEEN *waits, listening, in fear. Again the heels are heard.*

[*The* QUEEN *runs to the small door. She looks out.*

OOZIZI. Lady! Lady!

QUEEN. Oozizi.

OOZIZI. Lady! Lady! You must never leave the palace. You must never leave it. You must not.

QUEEN. Hark, it is quiet now.

OOZIZI. Lady, it would be terrible to leave the golden palace. Who would reign? What would happen?

QUEEN. It is quiet now. What would happen, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. The world would end.

QUEEN. It is quiet now; perhaps I need not fly.

OOZIZI. Lady, you must not.

QUEEN. And yet I would fain go over those green fields all gleaming with summer, and see the Golden Hoards that no man guards, glittering with such a light as glows this June.

OOZIZI. Oh, speak not, great lady, of the green fields and June! It is these that have intoxicated the Princes so that they do this unrecorded thing, letting sound of them be heard in your sacred room.

QUEEN. Has June intoxicated them, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. Oh, lady, speak not of June!

QUEEN. Is June so terrible? [*She returns towards* OOZIZI.

OOZIZI. It does strange things.

[*The noise breaks out again.*

Hark!

[*The* QUEEN *runs to the door again.* OOZIZI *stretches out her arms to the* QUEEN.

Oh, lady, never leave the golden palace!

[*The* QUEEN *listens; all is silent; she looks outside.*

QUEEN. I see the green fields gleaming. Strange flowers are standing among them, like princes I have not known.

OOZIZI. Oh, lady, speak not of the bewildering fields! They are all enchanted with summer, and they have maddened the Princes. It is dangerous to look at them, lady. [*The* QUEEN *gazes on over the fields.*

And yet you look.

QUEEN. I would fain go far over the strange soft fields; far and far to the high heathery lands——

OOZIZI. Lady, all is quiet; there is no danger; you must not leave the palace.

QUEEN. Yes, all is quiet. [*The* QUEEN *returns.*

OOZIZI. It was a passing madness seized the Princes.

QUEEN. Oozizi, when I hear the sound of all their feet it is dreadful, and I must fly. And when I see the wonderful fields in the sunlight, sloping away to lands I have never known, then I long to fly away and away for ever, passing from field to field and land to land.

OOZIZI. Lady, no, no!

QUEEN. Oozizi.

OOZIZI. Yes, great lady.

QUEEN. There is a mountain there that towers above the earth. It goes up into a calm of which our world knows nothing. Heaven, like a cloak, is draped about its shoulders. Why have none told me of this mountain, Oozizi?

OOZIZI [*awed*]. Æther Mountain.

QUEEN. Why has none told me?

OOZIZI. When your glorious mother, lady, loved for a day . . .

QUEEN. Yes, Oozizi. . . .

OOZIZI. She went, as all songs tell, to Æther Mountain.

QUEEN [*entranced*]. To Æther Mountain?

OOZIZI. So they sing at evening, when they throw down their loads of gold and rest.

QUEEN. To Æther Mountain.

OOZIZI. Lady, Destiny sent her; but you must not go. You must not leave your throne to go to Æther Mountain.

QUEEN. There is a calm upon it not of earth.

OOZIZI. You must not go, lady, you must not go.

QUEEN. I will not go.

[*The Princes drum again, still louder with their heels.* Hark! [OOZIZI *is frightened.* *The* QUEEN *runs to the door.* It is louder! They are nearer! They are coming here!

OOZIZI. No, lady. They would not dare!

QUEEN. I must go, Oozizi; I must go.

OOZIZI. No, lady. They will never dare. You must not. Hark! They come no nearer. June has maddened them, but they come no nearer. They are quiet now. Come back, lady. Leave the door, they come no nearer. See, it is all quiet now. They come no nearer, lady. [OOZIZI *catches her by the sleeve.*] Lady, you must not.

QUEEN [*much calmer, gazing away*]. Oozizi, I must go.

OOZIZI. No, no, lady! All is quiet; you must not go.

QUEEN [*calmly*]. It is calling for me, Oozizi.

OOZIZI. What is calling, lady? Nothing calls.

QUEEN. It is calling, Oozizi.

OOZIZI. Oh, lady, all is silent. No one calls.

QUEEN. It is calling for me now, Oozizi.

OOZIZI. No, no, lady. What calls?

QUEEN. Æther Mountain is calling. I know now who called my mother. It was Æther Mountain, Oozizi; he is calling.

OOZIZI. I—I scarce dare look out of the golden palace, lady, to where we must not go. Yet, yet I will look. [*She peers.*] Yes, yes, indeed; there stands old Æther Mountain. But he does not call. Indeed he does not call. He is all silent in heaven.

QUEEN. It is his voice, Oozizi.

OOZIZI. What, lady? I hear no voice.

QUEEN. That great, great silence is his voice, Oozizi. He is calling me out of that blue waste of heaven.

OOZIZI. Lady, I cannot understand.

QUEEN. He calls, Oozizi.

OOZIZI. Come away, lady. It is bad to look so long. Oh, if the Princes had not made their clamour heard! Oh, if they had not you had not gone to the door and seen Æther Mountain, and this trouble had not come. Oh! Oh! Oh!

QUEEN. There is no trouble upon Æther Mountain.

OOZIZI. Oh, lady, it is terrible that you should leave the palace.

QUEEN. There is no trouble there. Æther Mountain goes all calm into heaven. His grey-blue slopes are calm as the sky about him. There he stands calling. He is calling to me, Oozizi.

OOZIZI [*reflecting*]. Can it be?

QUEEN. What would you ask, Oozizi?

OOZIZI. Can it be that it is with you, great lady, as it was with the Queen, your mother, when Destiny sent her hence to Æther Mountain?

QUEEN. Æther Mountain calls.

OOZIZI. Lady, for a moment hear me. Come with me but a little while.

[*She leads the* QUEEN *slowly by the arm back to the throne.*

Lady, be seated here once more and take up the orb and sceptre in your small hands as of old.

[*The* QUEEN *patiently does as she is told.*

Now, if Destiny calls you, let him call to you as to a queen. Now, if it be for no whim of those that pass, that you would go so far from here to that great mountain, say, seated upon your throne in the golden palace with sceptre and orb in hand, say would you go forth, lady?

QUEEN [*almost dreaming*]. Æther Mountain calls.

[OOZIZI *bursts into tears. She helps the* QUEEN *by the arm from her throne, and leads her part of the way to the door. There she stops. The* QUEEN *goes on to the door alone.*

OOZIZI. Farewell, lady.

[*The* QUEEN *gazes out rapturously towards Æther Mountain. Then she walks back and embraces* OOZIZI.

QUEEN. Farewell, Oozizi.

OOZIZI. Farewell, great lady.

[*The* QUEEN *turns, then suddenly she runs swiftly and nimbly through the door and disappears.*

[*At once there is a murmur of voices from the Hall of the Hundred Princes.*

VOICES [*off*]. Ah, ah, ah! [OOZIZI *stands still weeping.*

[*Enter the Princes, exquisite and frivolous. They crowd past each other.*

MELIFLOR. And where is our little queen?

[OOZIZI *answers with a defiant look through her tears, which has its effect on them.*

MOOMOOMON [*foppishly*]. There, there.

XIMENUNG. Gone!

MELIFLOR. Come! Let us follow.

MOOMOOMON. Shall we?

SEVERAL. Yes.

MOOMOOMON. Come.

[*They stream across from the side-door right to the door in back,* OOZIZI *regarding them haughtily.*

OOZIZI [*menacingly*]. It is Æther Mountain.

[*Entranced, silent, last of all* ZOON *follows. Exeunt all the Princes.*

[*Sounds as of rough protest heard from the workers off. The grim brown heads of two or three peer round the door by which the Princes entered. Many come on, dumb, puzzled, turning their brown heads, searching. At last they cluster round* OOZIZI. *"Er?" they say.*

OOZIZI. Æther Mountain has called her.

[*They nod dumb heads gravely.*

CURTAIN

Scene III

On the base of Æther Mountain.

Right, heather sloping up to left, which is rugged with tumbled grey rocks.

Further left all the scene is filled with the rising bulk of Æther Mountain.

Low down, far off and small in the background to the right, appears a little palace of pure gold.

Enter right the QUEEN *running untired and nimble, unchecked by those grey rocks.*

Following her the tired PRINCES *come.*

ZOON *is no longer last, but about fourth, and gaining.*

MELIFLOR *leads.*

MELIFLOR. Permit me, great lady. My hand over the rocks. Permit . . . [*He falls and cannot rise.*

MOOMOOMON. Permit me. [*He falls too.*] These rocks; it is these rocks.

XIMENUNG [*going wearily*]. Great lady. A moment. One moment, great lady. Allow me.

[*But* ZOON *does not speak. Exeunt left the* QUEEN *and those* PRINCES *that have not fallen. The curtain falls on stragglers crossing the stage.*

CURTAIN

Scene IV

The summit.

On the snow on the pinnacle of Æther Mountain, with only bright blue sky all round and everywhere, recline QUEEN ZOOMZOOMARMA *and the* PRINCE OF ZOON.

QUEEN. You had known no love before, First of a Hundred?

ZOON. There is no love on earth, O Queen of All.

QUEEN. Only here.

ZOON. Pure love is only here on this peak lonely in heaven.

QUEEN. Would you love me elsewhere if we went from here?

ZOON. But we will never go from here.

QUEEN. No, we will never leave it.

ZOON. Lady, look down. [*She looks.*] The earth is sorrowful. [*She sighs.*] Cares. Cares. All over the wide surface we can see are troubles; troubles far off and grey, that harm not Æther Mountain.

QUEEN. It looks a long way off and long ago.

ZOON [*wonderingly*]. Only to-day we came to Æther Mountain.

QUEEN. Only to-day?

ZOON. We crossed a gulf of time.

QUEEN. It lies below us, all drowsy with years.

ZOON. Lady, here is your home, this peak that has entered heaven. Let us never leave your home.

QUEEN. I knew not until to-day of Æther Mountain. None had told me.

ZOON. Knew you never, lady, of love?

QUEEN. None had told me.

ZOON. This is your home; not earth; no golden palace. Reign here alone, not knowing the cares of men,

without yesterday or to-morrow, untroubled by history or council.

QUEEN. Yes, yes, we will return no more.

ZOON. See, lady, see the earth. Is it not as a dream just faded?

QUEEN. It is dim indeed, grey and dreamlike.

ZOON. It is the earth we knew.

QUEEN. It is all dreamlike.

ZOON. It is gone; we can dimly see it.

QUEEN. Was it a dream?

ZOON. Perhaps. It is gone now, and does not matter.

QUEEN. Poor earth. I hope it was real.

ZOON [*seizing her hand*]. Oh, Zoomzoomarma, say not you hope that earth was real. It is gone now. See; it is so far away. Sigh not for earth, O lady, sigh not for earth.

QUEEN. Why not, King of Æther Mountain?

ZOON. Because when you sigh for tiny things I tremble for your love. See how faint and small it is, and how far away.

QUEEN. I do not sigh for earth, King of the Mountain. I only wish it well.

ZOON. Oh, wish it not well, lady.

QUEEN. Let us wish the poor earth well.

ZOON. No, lady, no. Be with me always wholly, living not partly in dreams. There is no earth. It is but a dream that left us. See, see [*pointing down*], it is a dim dream.

QUEEN [*looking down*]. The people move there still. See, there is Prince Ximenung. Something down there seems almost unlike dreams.

ZOON. No, lady, it cannot be.

QUEEN. How know you, Lord of the Mountain?

ZOON. It was too unreal for life. Love was not there. Surely it was a dream.

QUEEN. Yes, I knew not love in the golden palace of Zoorm.

ZOON. Then indeed it was unreal, golden lady. Forget the dream of earth.

QUEEN. If love be real . . .

ZOON. Can you doubt it?

QUEEN. No. It was a dream. Just now I dreamt it. Are dreams bad, my prince?

ZOON. No. They are just dreams.

QUEEN. We will think of dreams no more.

ZOON. This is where love is, and here only. We should not dream too much or think of dreams, because the place is holy.

QUEEN. Is love here only, darling?

ZOON. Here only, Golden Queen. Do any others elsewhere love as we?

QUEEN. No, I think not.

ZOON. Then how can pure love be elsewhere?

QUEEN. It is true.

ZOON. On this clear peak that just enters heaven love is and only here. The rest is dreams.

QUEEN. Could we awake from love and find earth true?

ZOON. No, no, no. Sweet lady, let not such fancies alarm you.

QUEEN. And yet folks wake from dreams. It would be terrible.

ZOON. No, no, there are things too real for dreams. You cannot waken from love. Dreams are of fantastic things, things fanciful and weak, and things confused and intricate like earth. When you think of them in your dreams you see their unreality. But if love were not real what could there be to wake to?

QUEEN. True. How wise you are. It was but a fancy that troubled me. [*Looking down*] It was one of those dreams at dawn. It is faint and far-off now.

ZOON. Will you love me for ever, Golden Queen?

QUEEN. For ever. Why not? You will love me for ever?

ZOON. For ever. I cannot help it.

QUEEN. Let us look at the dream far off, in the dimness our thoughts have forsaken.

ZOON. Aye, let us look. It was a sad dream somewhat; and yet upon this peak where all is love all that we see seems happy.

QUEEN. See the dream there. Look at those. They seem to walk dreamily as they walk in the dream.

ZOON. It is because they have not love, which is only here.

QUEEN. Look! Look at those dreamers in the dream.

ZOON. They are running.

QUEEN. Oh! Look!

ZOON. They are pursued.

QUEEN. The brown ones are pursuing them with spears.

ZOON. It is Prince Meliflor, Prince Moomoomon, Prince Ximenung that run in the dream. And the Prince of Huz. The brown men are close.

QUEEN. The brown ones are overtaking them.

ZOON. Yes, they are closer.

QUEEN. Look! Prince Ximenung!

ZOON. Yes, he is dead in the dream.

QUEEN. The Prince of Huz?

ZOON. Speared.

QUEEN. Still, still they are killing them.

ZOON. It is all the Hundred Princes.

QUEEN. They are killing them all.

ZOON. A sad sight once.

QUEEN. Once?

ZOON. I should have wept once.

QUEEN. It is so far off now.

ZOON. It is so far, far off. We can only feel joy upon this holy mountain.

QUEEN. Only joy. [*He sighs as he looks.*] Look! [*He sighs again.*]

ZOON. There falls the poor Prince Meliflor.

QUEEN. How huge a thrust it was with the great spear.

ZOON. He is dead.

QUEEN. Are you not happy?

ZOON. Yes.

QUEEN. In your voice there seemed to sound some far-off thing. Some strange thing. Was it sorrow?

ZOON. No; we are too high; sorrow cannot come. No grief can touch us here, no woe drift up to us from the woes of earth.

QUEEN. I thought there was some strange thing in your voice, like sorrows we have dreamed.

ZOON. No, Golden Queen. Those fancied sorrows of dreams cannot touch reality.

QUEEN. You will never be sorry we have woken and left the dream of earth?

ZOON. No, glorious lady; nothing can bring me trouble ever again.

QUEEN. Not even I?

ZOON. Never you, my golden Zoomzoomarma, for on this sacred peak where there is only love you cannot.

QUEEN. We will dwell here for ever in endless joy.

ZOON [*looking down*]. All dead now, all the Princes.

QUEEN. Turn, my prince, from the dream of earth, lest trouble come up from it.

ZOON. It cannot drift up here; yet we will turn from the dream.

QUEEN. Let us think of endless joy upon the edge of heaven.

ZOON. Yes, Queen; for ever in reality while all else dream away.

QUEEN. It is the years that make them drowsy. They

dream to dream the years away. Time cannot reach so high as here, the years are far below us.

ZOON. Far below us, making a dream and troubling it.

QUEEN. They do not know in the dream that only love is real.

ZOON. If time could reach us here we should pass too. Nothing is real where time is.

QUEEN. How shall we spend the calm that time does not vex, together here for ever?

ZOON. Holding your hand. [*She gives it.*] And kissing it often in the calm of eternity. Sometimes watching, a moment, the dream go by; then kissing your hand again all in eternity.

QUEEN. And never wearying?

ZOON. Not while eternity lingers here in heaven.

QUEEN. Thus we will live until the dream goes by and earth has faded under Æther Mountain.

ZOON. And then we shall watch the calm of eternity.

QUEEN. And you will still kiss my hand at times.

ZOON. Yes, while eternity wiles heaven away.

QUEEN. The silence is like music on Æther Mountain.

ZOON. It is because all is real. In the dream nothing was real. Music had to be made, and then soon passed trembling away. Here all things always are as the desire of earth, earth's desire that groped among fantasies, finding them false.

QUEEN. Let us forget the dream.

ZOON [*kissing her hand*]. I have forgotten for ever.

QUEEN. Ah!

ZOON. What trouble has drifted up to you from earth?

QUEEN. An old saying.

ZOON. It was said in the dream.

QUEEN. It was true! [*She snatches her hand away.* Ah, I remember it. It was true.

ZOON. All is unreal but love, my crownéd Zoomzoomarma. Where there was not love it cannot have been true.

[*He tries to take her hand again.*

QUEEN. Touch not my hand. It was true.

ZOON. What was the saying heard in the dream of earth that was true?

QUEEN. None is worthy to touch my hand; no, none.

ZOON. By Æther Mountain, I will kiss your hand again! What is this saying out of a dream that dares deny reality?

QUEEN. It is true! Oh, it is true!

ZOON. Out of that hurried, aimless dream, that knows not its own end even, you have brought me a saying and say it against love.

QUEEN. I say it is true!

ZOON. Nothing is true against love. Fate only is greater.

QUEEN. Then it is Fate.

ZOON. Against Fate I will kiss your hand again.

QUEEN. None are worthy. No, none.

[*She draws her rapier.*

ZOON. I will kiss your hand again.

QUEEN. It must be this [*pointing with rapier*], for none are worthy.

ZOON. Though it be death I kiss your hand again.

QUEEN. It is certain death.

ZOON. Oh, Zoomzoomarma, forget that troubled dream, and things said by dreamers, while I kiss your hand in heaven, if only once again.

QUEEN. None are worthy. It is death. None are worthy. None.

ZOON. Though it be death, yet once again upon Æther Mountain in heaven I kiss your hand.

QUEEN. Away! It is death. Upon the word of a queen.

ZOON. I kiss your h . . .

[*She standing kills him kneeling. He falls off Æther Mountain, behind it out of sight.*

[*As he falls he calls her name after intervals. She kneels upon the summit and watches him falling, falling, falling.*

[*Fainter and fainter as he falls from that tremendous height comes up her name as he calls it.*

Zoomzoomarma! Zoomzoomarma! Zoomzoomarma!

[*Still she is watching, and he is falling still.*

[*At last, when his cry of "Zoomzoomarma!" comes almost unheard to that incredible height and then is heard no more, she turns, and with infinite neatness picking up her skirts steps down daintily over the snow.*

[*She is going earthward as the curtain falls.*

CURTAIN

ST SIMEON STYLITES

A ONE-ACT PLAY

By F. Sladen-Smith

"A gaunt, dark figure, far up in the blue Asian sky, he stood there for a sign and a warning to all men that our earthly life is short, whether for wickedness or repentance."

CHARACTERS

St Simeon Stylites
A Young Pilgrim
A King
His Jester
A Lady
Her Attendant
The Devil
His Friend

Scene. *The top of the column.*

This play was first produced by the Unnamed Society of Manchester on March 26, 1919, with the following cast:

St Simeon Stylites	L. Stanley Jast
A Young Pilgrim	Selkirk Chapman
A King	J. W. Morley
His Jester	J. Edward Roberts
A Lady	Florence Steven
Her Attendant	Dorothy Crosse
The Devil	C. J. McDermott
His Friend	W. Grimmond

Mr F. Sladen-Smith is a representative author of the new Amateur Movement, and it was with "St Simeon Stylites" that an English company — the Huddersfield Thespians—first took a prize in the Little Theatre Tournament in New York. He has been producer, since 1916, to the Unnamed Society of Manchester, whence also are derived the plays of Mr Stanley Jast; a society of which the general policy is to encourage the anti-naturalistic drama, and to demonstrate how much, on a small stage, can be accomplished by intelligent stage-decoration.

Mr Sladen-Smith's dramatic work is characterized by a strong sense of fantasy and satire. His plays, notably "The Tower of Babel" and "Solomon and Sheba," deal mainly with the picturesque and romantic figures of the Eastern world, and constitute a series of witty colour-dramas of a distinctly original type.

ST SIMEON STYLITES[1]

As any attempt to render this scene naturalistically is foredoomed to failure, the setting should be as decorative as possible. Suffice it, therefore, to say that out of the nodding tops of trees rises the quaintly carved capital of a huge column with a perfectly flat top, on which sits St Simeon in great glory, cross-legged and with a huge book on his knees. Beside him is a jug of water and a neatly baked loaf. A light railing runs round the top of the capital. At the back is seen the commencement of a ladder, large and strong, evidently leading down to the world below, of which one gets a glimpse through the trees —a tiny, toy-like village amidst vast stretches of desert leading to the far distant towers and battlements of Antioch. The time is getting on towards evening.

SIMEON [*reading out of the book*]. "Who shall measure the folly of man, and who shall understand his exceeding vileness? Who shall go into a city and behold truth, and who shall walk upon the ramparts and meet wisdom?" [*Looking up*] It seems to me that would much depend upon the quality of the ramparts. [*He reads again.*] "Who shall meet with a woman and feel the better after the meeting, and who shall converse with a damsel and be spiritually

[1] Published by Mr Basil Blackwell (paper covers, 1*s.* 6*d.* net). Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

uplifted?" [*Looking up*] Surely he who keeps a grain of common sense in his composition. [*Reading again*] "Are not women the scourge of humanity, and is not the sight of a woman a spiritual eyesore?" [*Reflecting*] Those early Fathers must have met some terrible women in their day. I should much like to meet similar creatures. All the women who come to see me are remarkably tame. [*Reading*] "My son, if thou value peace and equity avoid a female as thou wouldst the plague. Fly from her as fast as thy strength permits, but be not cast down if thou find she hath followed thee. It is her nature to pursue; redouble therefore thy efforts, and perhaps, by the aid of heavenly cunning, thou mayest escape into a safe haven." [*Looking up*] Well, there is surely no haven like to the top of a column. But the Fathers are marvellously hard on women. I think they could never have met one—although that would be a very difficult achievement, certainly.

A VOICE [*below*]. Simeon! Simeon!

SIMEON. Who calls me?

THE VOICE [*coming nearer*]. Sedulius, the pilgrim, calls you.

SIMEON. Has Sedulius the pilgrim brought an offering?

THE VOICE. Yes; two baskets of dates has Sedulius brought.

SIMEON. Two baskets of dates? [*Thinks for a moment, then shrugs his shoulders.*] Well—you may come.

[*After a pause a head is seen coming up the ladder.*

THE HEAD. Hail, mighty Simeon, hail!

SIMEON [*with profound indifference*]. Hail! It is a great pity, young man, to waste your breath before you've reached the top of the ladder.

SEDULIUS [*appearing more fully*]. It's a stiff climb, certainly.

[*He arrives on top, and stands looking at* SIMEON

with great curiosity. He is young, pale, and enthusiastic. Dressed in a coarse pilgrim costume.

SEDULIUS. So you are the great Saint Simeon, and this your holy column! [*Suddenly kneeling with great reverence*] Oh, praise be to the angels that I have lived to see this day!

SIMEON. Young man, if you're not careful you'll fall off. That railing is by no means invincible. Also, I have not yet been canonized. What was that about dates?

SEDULIUS [*eagerly*]. I have brought two boxes, Father; one in honour of St Cosmo and one in honour of St Damian. [*Stands up and searches his clothing.*] Here is St Cosmo [*brings out a box*], and here is . . . here is . . . [*unavailing search*] . . . here is . . . [*He gives a cry of despair.*] Oh, Father, I believe I've left St Damian's box at the bottom of the column!

SIMEON [*peevishly*]. Most careless of you, I must say.

SEDULIUS. I will tell some one to bring it up to you to-morrow morning.

SIMEON. Why can you not bring it up yourself?

SEDULIUS. Because I must leave here as soon as I have seen you in order to visit the holy Cornelia of Cletus. Fancy, they say she has eaten nothing for three years!

SIMEON. It is evidently a pity you turned out of your way to visit me. Perhaps you had better hurry on to the holy Cornelia now. It would be a calamity if she died before you got there.

SEDULIUS. But you are far more famous than the holy Cornelia.

SIMEON. I should not have thought so from the way you speak.

SEDULIUS. Why, I have only a small box of plums for

Cornelia! A small box in honour of St Hilarion. I brought *you* two boxes of dates.

SIMEON. One, and a promise. I hope Hilarion will see that Cornelia gets the plums. Not that they will be much use to her if she eats nothing.

SEDULIUS. No, but it looks well, doesn't it?

SIMEON. You are evidently a detestable young man. I am sorry I cautioned you about falling off the column.

SEDULIUS [*kneeling*]. Oh, Father, please don't be angry. I have come an enormously long way to see you. It has taken me quite five years to get here.

SIMEON. How many saints and hermits and holy women have you visited on the way?

SEDULIUS. Oh, all I could, you know. I've not missed anything or anyone that I could possibly help. That's why it took such a time.

SIMEON. I thought so. I am simply one of a number.

SEDULIUS. But the greatest one of all, Father.

SIMEON [*somewhat mollified*]. You should not try to flatter me.

SEDULIUS [*gazing at him with rapt eyes*]. But it is true. All the world has heard of you and your wonderful austerities. Why, a visit to you gives one an introduction into the best society. They tell me that, once seen, you're impossible to forget. Most people would give anything to be able to come and talk to you like this.

SIMEON. Most people, certainly, give more than two boxes of dates—one and a promise, I should say.

SEDULIUS. Father, I am not rich. They sell these date-boxes at the bottom of your column. There is a shop there with a large notice carved in stone—"Dates for the Saint sold here." And they are not at all expensive.

SIMEON [*reflectively*]. So that's why I am deluged with dates nowadays. I have often wondered. Young man,

if you are not rich how can you spend five years in travelling?

SEDULIUS. I don't know. I felt I had to. Oh, Father, the world is so lovely and freedom so glorious!

SIMEON. That is not at all an original thought, nor was it expressed in an original manner. Neither does it explain why you are dressed in a pilgrim's costume.

SEDULIUS. Well, you see, the only really inexpensive way of travelling nowadays is to go as a pilgrim. One sees most things free of charge, and even when there is a charge no one expects a pilgrim to pay very heavily.

SIMEON. Did they let you have your dates cheap?

SEDULIUS. There is a special brand they keep for pilgrims. The dates are a little inferior, but——

SIMEON [*roused*]. Oh, are they? I must see about this! Mark my words, that shop will not exist after to-night. I'll teach them to send me inferior dates!

SEDULIUS. Father, I hope you're going to do nothing rash.

SIMEON. Young man, living perpetually on the top of a column is scarcely likely to induce rashness. I am calm but firm, as always. So you masquerade as a pilgrim in order to travel cheaply? A highly reprehensible proceeding.

SEDULIUS. Not exactly. You have no idea how the sight of all these saints and sages inflames me. Sometimes I am almost drunk with faith. Oh, I do think you are all so glorious! And it is so nice to come and see you. I could talk to each one of you for hours; it—it rejuvenates me somehow.

SIMEON. The holy Cornelia little knows what she has in store for her. I'm surprised to hear you need rejuvenation. I cannot say you rejuvenate me.

SEDULIUS. No; but it would take an awful lot to do that, wouldn't it?

SIMEON. Don't be impertinent. So you go restlessly up and down the world, living, I suppose, on charity, and glutting your eyes with foolish sights?

SEDULIUS. You are not very kind to yourself, Father, when you say that.

SIMEON [*shouting at him*]. I am never kind to myself, young man; I never have been kind to myself, I never intend to be kind to myself. I don't approve of it.

SEDULIUS. I suppose not, or you wouldn't be here.

SIMEON. That has nothing to do with it.

SEDULIUS. Surely it must have everything to do with it. Tell me, are you up here always?

SIMEON. Always.

SEDULIUS. In all weathers?

SIMEON. In all weathers.

SEDULIUS. Even when it rains?

SIMEON. I like it better when it rains.

SEDULIUS. *Wonderful!* I don't know how you do it, Father.

SIMEON. I can quite imagine it would be rather a mystery to you — you self-indulgent, good-for-nothing jackanapes!

SEDULIUS. It makes me feel deliciously humble when you say that.

SIMEON [*thoroughly annoyed*]. Very well! Have all the delicious sensations you like, feast your eyes on the sight of asceticism, observe every detail, and wallow in edification and then get you gone, for you have already had more than your box of dates' worth—and inferior dates at that, upon my soul. Climb down that ladder and hurry off to gloat over holy Cornelia.

SEDULIUS [*softly*]. Why don't you climb down the ladder yourself, Father? The world is very fresh and green and young this spring. Why don't you come down and see

the town and all its curious sights? There are houses, Father, that have little gold windows set with vermilion shutters and shops where they sell strange and fascinating merchandise and temples of ivory inlaid with pearls——

SIMEON. Rubbish! I detest that kind of foolery.

SEDULIUS. Then there are great seas with wonderful white boats on them, boats that carry one from city to city, and each city is full of marvellous and extraordinary things. And when one has finished the cities there are mountains and rivers and streams to explore and roads that lead one ever and ever onwards. Think of the overwhelming beauty of a road that leads over a hill. You must go up it, Father—just to see what is on the other side. Oh, the great world is inexpressibly wonderful—and inexhaustible! Fancy, if I travelled all my life I should never see all of it!

SIMEON. What do I care about your vermilion roofs and golden shutters?

SEDULIUS. No, no, Father; you spoil it. Golden windows and *vermilion* shutters.

SIMEON. Vermilion fiddlesticks! What do I care about such bosh as that?

SEDULIUS. But the long winding roads, Father, all gay with trees and fields and little flowers and going over strange mountains in the distance, don't you care for these? Wouldn't you rather be on them than on the top of this column?

SIMEON. Certainly not.

SEDULIUS. Father, give it up and come with me along the roads and see how wonderful the earth is . . .

SIMEON. Don't be silly.

SEDULIUS [*after a pause*]. Do you know, you really are extraordinary. You're more extraordinary than all the others. Tell me, what gives you the strength to mortify yourself like this?

SIMEON. You are the last person to whom I should answer that question.

SEDULIUS. Father, I must know, I burn to know. Is it faith that makes you perform such a monstrous act of penance?

SIMEON. I shall not answer you if you remain here all night.

SEDULIUS. It *is* faith, it must be faith, I'm sure it's faith. How marvellous! But isn't the suffering fearful, Father, do you not endure agonies?

SIMEON. Let me remind you Cornelia is waiting. She may prove more communicative.

SEDULIUS. But, Father, are you remaining here for long? Don't you intend to come down from the column soon?

SIMEON. Of course not. I shall sit here for an immense period.

SEDULIUS. It is quite unbelievable. My whole soul is refreshed by the sight of your penitence.

SIMEON. Then stop your senseless gadding about and come and sit on the top of a pillar like me.

SEDULIUS. Oh, I couldn't possibly. I must travel now until I die.

SIMEON. I thought so. Travel on, then, to the holy Cornelia. Good evening.

SEDULIUS. Give me your blessing before I go.

SIMEON. Certainly not. That is the last thing you deserve.

SEDULIUS. Father, I shall not go until I receive your blessing. I've been travelling five years to get it.

SIMEON. Then you'll also sit here for an immense period. Poor Cornelia! [*A trumpet is heard far below.*

SEDULIUS. What is that?

SIMEON. How should I know?

SEDULIUS [*looking over the column*]. Oh! Oh! I can see a

wonderful procession—horses and litters and soldiers. Oh, what pretty costumes—and that great gold chariot in the centre! Father, some king must be passing by the column.

SIMEON [*yawning*]. Very probably. They often do.

SEDULIUS. Oh, I must go down and see it all. I can hurry on to Cornelia afterwards. I must not miss this.

SIMEON. Let me beg of you to miss nothing. Good-bye.

SEDULIUS [*descending in a hurry*]. Good-bye. And really, Father, I don't know how you do it! I don't know how you do it! [*Disappears.*

SIMEON. Bah! [*Yawns heavily, and takes a date from the box and examines it carefully. Evidently displeased with it, he throws it down in the direction of the retreating* SEDULIUS.] Impudent jackanapes! Vermilion roofs and golden shutters! Pah! [*Opens book and reads.*] "Fret not thyself because of fools, for of fools consists the multitude of the earth. There is no remedy for a foolish man but silence, and no dealing with an imbecile save by way of kicks." [*Looking up and smiling with satisfaction*] A marvellously true saying. [*The trumpet is heard louder and nearer.*] A plague on all senseless noises! Am I never to escape from the sound of foolery? [*Reading again*] "The life of man leapeth up as a furnace, and it is woman who puffeth the flame"—still harping on woman. "The heart of man is set on fire by strange devices, and all wild beasts are not within the wood." No, truly. They come and roam around, and in the guise of men work everlasting havoc. Ah, when shall all mankind—— [*The trumpet again.*] Curse the silly trumpet! Just as I was beginning a meditation that might have been profitable.

A VOICE [*far below*]. Way for the King of Vararanes!

SIMEON. Truly there is no peace, even on the top of a

column. I will read diligently. "Woman cometh in the morning with a smile of silk, and crieth out at thy exceeding greatness, and lo! by nightfall she hath abased thee in the dust. Yea, before the stars twinkle a great abasement shall befall thee, for when does a——"

THE JESTER [*climbing the ladder*]. Way for the King of Vararanes!

SIMEON [*closing the book and sitting upright*]. Sancta Simplicitas, he is coming here!

JESTER [*below*]. Way for the King of Vararanes!

SIMEON. Only you can obstruct him on the ladder, blockhead.

JESTER [*his head appearing*]. Prepare for the honour that awaits you.

SIMEON [*grimly*]. I am prepared.

JESTER. His Sublime Majesty follows.

SIMEON. So I suppose.

JESTER. His Sublime Majesty longs to see you.

SIMEON. To judge from the delay, his Sublime Majesty seems to be in difficulties. Why do you not help him instead of talking like this?

JESTER [*arriving on the column*]. His Sublime Majesty——

KING [*his head appearing*]. Peace, fool, and do not disturb the saint.

SIMEON. I told you not to talk.

[*The* JESTER *kneels at the back on the left. The* KING *arrives on the column, and, passing round, stands looking down intently at* ST SIMEON.

KING. So you are the great Saint Simeon, and this your holy column!

SIMEON [*bored*]. Yes.

KING. You have astonished the world by your penitence and austerity.

SIMEON. Yes.

KING. You have utterly subdued the flesh, and your spirit is untrammelled by earthly lusts.

SIMEON. Yes.

KING. You have gained the crown of heavenly wisdom, and day by day your life revolves in an unbroken peace.

SIMEON [*cheerfully*]. Not of necessity. The wind might blow me off the column, you know.

JESTER [*dismally*]. You would then revolve in broken pieces. [ST SIMEON *looks round with a stiff, stony stare.*

KING. You sit here apart from all men, austere and grave, and watch the destinies of the world hanging on a thread.

JESTER [*as before*]. Which is far better than hanging on a rope.

SIMEON [*turning round sharply*]. Who *is* that man?

KING. My jester.

SIMEON. And is that a specimen of his jesting?

KING. Well, he has to earn his living, you know.

SIMEON. And do you put up with it?

KING. It is part of my duty to put up with everything.

SIMEON. Humph! I wonder you stand it.

KING. A king has to stand many things; even the jokes of his Court jester. A king's way is a weary way, Simeon. You imagine us proud, perhaps happy; wealthy and satisfied——

SIMEON. No; I imagine you foolish and helpless.

KING. Well—we are. I might have known your wisdom would comprehend all things. There is no suffering like a king's suffering. Not many men would welcome death so readily as I should.

SIMEON [*stifling a yawn*]. Extremely edifying. Is there any special reason why you came to see me? Have you time to give way to curiosity?

KING. I have no time to give way to anything.

SIMEON. Then you must indeed be extraordinarily busy.

JESTER [*monotonously*]. Now, the difference between a king's way and a subject's way is this: a subject gives way and makes way, while a king gives no way, but his way is weighed, weighing——

SIMEON. Can't you possibly stop him?

KING. Heliototogabalus, cease!

SIMEON. Is that his name?

KING. Yes.

SIMEON. I don't wonder you are unhappy with a jester like that, and named Heliototogabalus into the bargain. Have you no humorists in your country?

KING. Yes; but they are nearly all archbishops. Not that I need humour. My soul is so saddened by the endless panorama of human misery that a definite joke is painful to me.

SIMEON. Good gracious! Even I have by no means reached that state. Only last week an old apple-woman told me a remark of her infant son which made me laugh so much that I knocked all the apples she had brought off the column.

JESTER. So the incident ended *un'appily*.

SIMEON [*really startled*]. *What?* Your Majesty, is it possible you suffer this man to exist?

KING. I condemn no one, Simeon. Heliototogabalus does according to his lights. It is not for me to judge him. Permit me to say that if I am merciful I should have thought that you, as a saint, would have been still more merciful.

SIMEON. King, as a saint I endeavour to be merciful, but as a human being I have nerves. It is your inhumanity that makes you unhappy. What is the use of watching the endless panorama of human misery? Either plunge into it, or leave it utterly.

KING. A king cannot plunge into the ordinary stream of

life and mix with the common people. Every instinct of his life is against it.

SIMEON. Then leave it all and come and sit on the top of a column like me.

KING. Heaven forbid! Such a life would be quite impossible after all I have experienced.

SIMEON. Well, what do you want of me? You will not take my advice. You say you have not come to see me out of curiosity. What is it you want?

KING [*eagerly*]. I want your help and assistance, Simeon. I want you to leave the column and come down with me. Not one friend have I in those around me except, perhaps, this miserable jester. There is no one I can trust, there is no one to whom I can pour out my heart. All are gone, God help me—dead or utterly corrupted—and I am left with a mouldering Court and distracted country. Come down, therefore, and save us. Leave your column and its unfruitful austerity, come, and spiritually uplift the land. I offer you no earthly reward. I know full well that gold and honours mean as little to you as they do to me. But here is work to be done, glorious work, and only you can do it. Come down from the column and do battle with the Powers of Darkness once more.

SIMEON. Is your country a large one?

KING. It is a very large one.

SIMEON. And in all that country is there not one with power to rise up and stamp out these evils which move you to so much eloquence?

KING. Not one. I have looked for years, but all in vain. I only see evil in the hearts of men, unending evil.

SIMEON. I don't believe it.

KING. Simeon, it is true.

SIMEON. Bah! You feed yourself on misery, and your thoughts are blackened by your peculiar diet. Go down

and spiritually uplift yourself, and see if that does not alter things somewhat. As for me, I shall certainly not come down from the column. Nothing would induce me to do so.

KING. Nothing will induce you?

SIMEON. No. I shall sit here for an immense period.

KING. Well—I do not understand it, Simeon.

SIMEON. Very probably you don't, [*turning round*] and I have no doubt Heliototogabalus understands it still less.

JESTER. Now, the difference between standing under and understanding is this: understanding is——

SIMEON. Yes, yes, that will do. Because you were mentioned there is no need for professional assistance.

KING. What can possibly give you the strength to persist in a life like this?

SIMEON. What do you suppose?

KING. I have learnt through sad experience that men only persist in one course of action when they are sure of reaping some great material benefit, but as in your case material benefit seems out of the question I can only put it down to superhuman piety.

JESTER. Now, the difference between piety and satiety is this: piety——

SIMEON. Heliototogabalus!

JESTER. Well, when *am* I to be funny?

SIMEON. You know perfectly well that you never could be funny, never will be funny, and never have been funny. When *do* you consider a joke out of season?

JESTER [*sulkily*]. When it's one of your speeches.

SIMEON. Impudent jackanapes! I will show you in what season I——

KING. Oh, come; I don't think that was so bad.

SIMEON. I consider it the worst remark of the lot. By the vermilion shutters of Sedulius——

JESTER [*genuinely astonished*]. What language from a saint!

SIMEON. It's an expression I learnt just before you came. By the vermilion shutters of Sedulius, it is time for chastisement. Hear, O foolish king, and still more foolish jester, the judgment I pronounce on you. [*The* KING *and* JESTER *are somewhat frightened.*] First, you have grievously——

A WOMAN'S VOICE [*from the ladder*]. Simeon! Simeon!

SIMEON. Was ever man so plagued in one afternoon! Here comes a woman just as I was about to curse heavily.

VOICE. Simeon, we are coming up—although it's a truly terrible ladder!

SIMEON. There is no room for you if you do come. We are frightfully overcrowded as it is.

VOICE. My mistress is most anxious to see you—but I'm certain this ladder will kill us both.

SIMEON. Then tell your mistress to go down again if she would avoid being pushed off the column when she gets here.

PROCLA [*her head appearing*]. Brute! Do you mean to say you push women off when they come to see you? Oh, I do feel so queer when it sways about like this!

SIMEON. Of course I do not push them off, but there is not room for four people to visit me at once with safety. Tell your mistress that.

PROCLA. My mistress will only say that is nonsense.

SIMEON. Woman, a mother brought four of her sons to see me last month. They became excited—and she went back with two. Do you understand? With two.

KING [*to* JESTER]. Send them away and we will go.

JESTER. Climb down again that the King of Vararanes may leave in peace. [PROCLA *confers with some one below.*

PROCLA. My mistress says she will not climb down again now she has got all this way up, not for any amount of kings. Oh, I wish I were not on this awful ladder! If you

do not let me come on the column I shall fall off, I know I shall! In fact, I'm falling off now! Help! Help! Help!

SIMEON. Well, I do not know what to do. You can come up, but I have no idea where you will put yourself while the others go. [JESTER *helps* PROCLA *on to the column.*

PROCLA. That is quite simple, I shall sit at your feet like this. [*Sits at his feet and leans her head upon him.*

SIMEON. Hussy!

PROCLA. Well, I must balance myself somehow.

SIMEON. King, will you not protect me from this outrage?

KING. I rarely interfere with other people's actions. Bid the other damsel come, and we will go.

SIMEON. But—but this is grossly improper!

PROCLA. Don't be silly. You know perfectly well you're quite ancient enough to be my great-great-grandfather.

KING. And nothing is proper or improper to me. [*To* EUDOCIA *below*] You may come up.

SIMEON. You have no right to tell her that.

KING. We cannot remain here all night, Simeon, and as she will not go down she must come up.

JESTER. Now the difference between coming down and coming up is——

EUDOCIA [*her head appearing*]. Where is Procla? [*Sees her.*] Oh!

SIMEON. Madam, it is not my fault that your maid has no sense of decency.

PROCLA. Madam, this is done in self-protection. I sit here to avoid falling off the column.

EUDOCIA [*as she is helped up by the* JESTER]. Well, you both look awfully quaint.

PROCLA. So I suppose, but I assure you any element of pleasure is singularly absent from the proceeding.

SIMEON [*raising his arms*]. I have never been so insulted

for years! Miserable man that I am, to have to put up with all these indignities!

PROCLA. Please don't shake so. You'll have me off yet.

KING. Good-bye, Simeon. I grieve that I leave you tormented and flouted by a couple of worthless women, but to suffer indignity has ever been the lot of the saints, and I have long observed that all decency has vanished from the world.

[*The* JESTER *climbs a little way down the ladder, and stands waiting for his master.*

EUDOCIA [*sharply*]. Procla, leave the saint and stand up at once. [PROCLA, *rather gingerly, obeys.*] Great king, we are neither worthless nor indecorous. My maid is a mere child, who knows not right or wrong, but I have travelled far in order to pay a visit to this most holy man, and he shall not lack from me the reverence due to his high estate. You do myself and womankind alike an injustice to suppose us lacking in a sense of decency. It is men who disgrace the world by their behaviour, not women.

PROCLA. Bravo, madam, bravo! I quite agree. I like that.

KING. I crave pardon, madam. I might have known that one as beautiful as you would lack neither wisdom nor courtesy.

EUDOCIA [*melting at once*]. Oh, sire, you do me the most infinite honour.

[*Both are about to exchange a ceremonious bow.*

SIMEON [*in agony*]. Oh, please, please be careful. There really is *not* room for elaborate fooleries.

KING. That is true. Farewell, madam; the saints keep the sorrows and miseries of a naughty world far from your heart! Farewell, Simeon; some day, perhaps, you will realize it would be better to help mankind than persist in unnecessary heroism. Peace be with you, great and useless saint.

SIMEON. And with you too, miserable and still more useless king; with you too.

JESTER [*descending the ladder, the* KING *following*]. Way for the King of Vararanes! Way for the King of Vararanes! Way for the King of Vararanes——

SIMEON. A thoroughly unsatisfactory and wretched——

EUDOCIA [*interrupting him*]. Oh, please do not trouble about him. I want to talk to you so much.

PROCLA. Madam, if you are going to converse may I sit and watch the crowd below? I'm sure that will be far more interesting than listening to this tiresome old man.

SIMEON. Do you permit your servant to insult me?

EUDOCIA. She is a child, a mere child.

SIMEON. Rubbish! It is perfectly obvious her childhood is entirely a thing of the past; and in any case youth is no excuse for bad manners.

PROCLA. Old dotard, youth is always excused when——

EUDOCIA. Procla, sit and watch the crowd, and occupy yourself with gay thoughts.

PROCLA. How can I possibly occupy myself with gay thoughts in close proximity to a skeleton?

EUDOCIA. Amuse yourself as best you can, Procla, and I will give you something very beautiful when we get down from the column.

[PROCLA *sits down, somewhat peevishly, and turns her back to them.*

SIMEON. You are extraordinarily attentive to her.

EUDOCIA. Well, you see, she is wonderful at doing one's hair; in fact, there is no one quite like her, and consequently she must be humoured a little.

SIMEON. So you are a slave to your slave.

EUDOCIA. Naturally. Oh, it is thrilling to be here. So you are the great Saint Simeon, and this your holy——

SIMEON. Please don't. That is how every one begins. I thought you wanted a real conversation.

EUDOCIA. So I do, although I don't quite know how to start. You see, I have not met many saints before.

SIMEON. So I should imagine.

EUDOCIA. Oh, you must not think holiness is absolutely *new* to me, but—you understand. It doesn't usually come my way.

SIMEON. I understand.

EUDOCIA. That is why it's so extraordinarily thrilling now I've actually got here.

SIMEON. Have you travelled far?

EUDOCIA. Yes, quite a great distance. I live right over the mountains; it is so far away you cannot see the hills where I have my home. Such a charming home it is, too; I think you'd like it. I've got such pretty things. My name is Eudocia, and I'm quite well known, you know—quite famous, in fact.

SIMEON. What for?

EUDOCIA. What for? Oh, you are strange. My . . . my beauty, I suppose. Do you think I'm beautiful? Don't tell me so unless you really think it, there is no need.

SIMEON. Why do you ask me?

EUDOCIA. I felt I should like to know. So many people have told me how beautiful I am, but of course they were not . . . not perhaps saints . . . not saints like you are, you know . . . and I thought, somehow . . . well, I thought I should like to hear you say it too.

SIMEON. Well, then, I think you beautiful. To be sure I've seen women quite as beautiful, but still—you are beautiful.

EUDOCIA. How strange. It does not make me a bit angry to hear you say it like that, but if Demophilus or Gennadius said it, how furious I should be!

SIMEON. And who are Demophilus and Gennadius?

EUDOCIA. Oh, two friends of mine. Both quite delightful in their way.

SIMEON. No doubt. And so you came to see me out of curiosity?

EUDOCIA. Curiosity? Well, we'll call it curiosity for the present.

SIMEON. Are you satisfied?

EUDOCIA. You are much gentler than I supposed. They told me you were awfully savage. That is why I was so severe to the King of Vararanes, poor man. You see, I was getting my courage up.

SIMEON. I can be very savage when I like.

EUDOCIA. Then why aren't you savage now?

SIMEON. Because you—you amuse me.

EUDOCIA. Amuse you? I'm not sure that's quite nice. What in the world is there funny about me?

SIMEON. Don't you object to your maid hearing this conversation?

EUDOCIA. Procla? Oh, nothing interests Procla but herself. That's why she is so invaluable. Please go on ; why am I funny?

SIMEON. You're so determined to be attractive at all costs. That is very childish of you.

EUDOCIA. I'm glad you think I'm young.

SIMEON. I did not say that. I do not think you are. I mean your mind is childish, that's all.

EUDOCIA. My mind is remarkably alive, and not nearly so simple as you seem to imagine, Simeon. You are making a mistake.

SIMEON. I do not think I am. It's perfectly obvious you are fondly hoping to make an impression on me, and only some one with a very inexperienced and crude mind would try to do that.

EUDOCIA. You know, you are extremely rude.

SIMEON. You surely did not come here for politeness. In fact, I believe you don't know why you came here.

EUDOCIA. There you are wrong. I know quite well why I came.

SIMEON. Then tell me why.

EUDOCIA. Well, you see, the men one generally meets are such fools. Now, they really are simple and crude—just animals in fact, nothing more. They're so—so *easy*. It's no good pretending that it's hard work pleasing them, because it isn't. And so I got a little tired of all the flattery and caresses, and . . . you know, everything; and felt I should love to meet a man on whom I had no effect whatever—who was impervious to my beauty.

SIMEON. You lie, Eudocia, you lie. You came to see me in order to add one more to your list of conquests, and the most unusual of all. That was the attraction, my dear; you wanted to see if your powers were equal to the task of seducing a saint.

EUDOCIA. Simeon, don't. Even if you think such things you ought not to say them.

SIMEON. But it happens to be true.

EUDOCIA. It's not true, it's not—well, what if it is?

SIMEON. Oh, nothing. It is a matter of little or no moment to me. It amuses me, that is all.

EUDOCIA. You lie, Simeon, you lie. You're not nearly so comfortable as you endeavour to appear.

SIMEON. I presume you know your behaviour is perfectly outrageous?

EUDOCIA. That is a matter of little or no moment to me. Simeon, Simeon, are you not glad I came to visit you?

SIMEON. No. On the contrary, I find you most disturbing.

EUDOCIA. Oh, how curious to hear *you* say that!

SIMEON. I suppose people have said it before.

EUDOCIA. Only those whom I really interest. I know at once whether I interest a man or no—a curious instinct tells me and I am never wrong. Some people I have no influence over, but there are others who will do whatever I bid them, at once. Oh, it is so thrilling, to have some one absolutely at your mercy, to do what you will with them —it is the most intoxicating thing on earth. There are people I can sway as the wind sways a cornfield.

SIMEON. I am not one of them.

EUDOCIA. You are.

SIMEON. I deny that, absolutely.

EUDOCIA. Simeon, say that is a lie.

SIMEON [*looking at her intently*]. It . . . it is a lie.

EUDOCIA. Thank you.

SIMEON [*rising in an outburst*]. Oh, you vampire, you bird of prey, you scourge of humanity! How dare you come here and disturb my holy meditation?

PROCLA [*looking round*]. I'm so hungry.

SIMEON. Give her that box of dates. [EUDOCIA *does so.*] How dare you come into the very presence of holiness with your foul witchcraft?

EUDOCIA. But it is not witchcraft. It is a power I have had given me just as you have had powers given you. I am not a bit ashamed of it. Simeon, I could make you love me. I have heard you described so often, and all the time a thought kept whispering in my heart that you belonged to my world despite your holiness—all I heard about you convinced me of this. So at length I decided to come and find out for myself. And, Simeon, as soon as I saw you, I *knew*—I knew I was right. I could make you love me—passionately.

SIMEON. I do not think so. You attract me strangely;

I admit it, freely and frankly; but it would go no further. It would go no further.

EUDOCIA [*looking up at him*]. Simeon, say that is a lie.

SIMEON [*looking down at her intently*]. It is a lie. [*Suddenly*] Oh, unhappy man that I am!

EUDOCIA [*exultantly*]. Simeon, you have admitted I attract you. You have admitted I could make you love me. Why, you love me now! Oh, I triumph. . . . Simeon, Simeon, come down from the column!

SIMEON. What?

EUDOCIA. Come down from the column. Leave your foolish and useless mortification; come down from the column, away with me.

SIMEON. Come down from the column? My dear, you're talking nonsense.

EUDOCIA. Oh, I'm not. Cannot you see that your old life has shrunk into nothingness—that now we've met it's all perfectly useless?

SIMEON. Absolute nonsense.

EUDOCIA. Simeon, say that is a lie.

SIMEON. It is not a lie.

EUDOCIA. Simeon, say it is a——

SIMEON [*with great decision*]. It is not a lie! [*Looks at her and laughs.*]

EUDOCIA [*dismayed*]. I see nothing to laugh at.

SIMEON. But I do. I admit you managed to put my brain in a whirl—in fact, you excited me enormously; but when you ask me to give up my whole life and come down from the column to start some senseless career with you—well, Eudocia, you're simply making a fool of yourself.

EUDOCIA. Not more than you are. Do you mean to say that you actually do not intend to come down from the column now you have got a really glorious opportunity? Don't you intend to come down in any case very soon?

SIMEON [*resuming his sitting posture*]. No; I shall sit here for—for a considerable time. [*Looks up at her, smiling.*] And I am very grateful to you, Eudocia, both for an exciting little change and for so promptly recalling me to my senses at the last moment.

EUDOCIA. Horrible! And insulting also. Oh, I could cry, I'm so bitterly disappointed.

SIMEON. Please don't cry, Eudocia. Believe me, the situation does not demand it. No, no, we had a little excitement which ended quite happily, and now we'll be good friends.

EUDOCIA. But, don't—don't you like me any more?

SIMEON. Of course I like you; but when you make an absurd request that I shall give up my life and come away with you—well, my dear, it simply makes me see everything in its proper proportion. And that, I should imagine, is precisely what you should avoid doing if you wish for success.

EUDOCIA. How was I to know you would behave outrageously at the wrong moment? I never met such a dreadful man! Fancy preferring a wretched, dangerous life on the top of this preposterous column to . . . to a life that would give you everything you wanted, in which you could develop all your faculties. I suppose it is faith that makes you behave like this, but what faith! What gigantic, immeasurable faith! The very thought of it appals me.

PROCLA [*looking round suddenly*]. These dates are vile.

SIMEON. I was afraid they would be. Eudocia, there is no need to be appalled. You live your life, I live mine.

EUDOCIA. Yes; but there must be some extraordinary motive behind yours. No one, except a complete imbecile, would sit perched up here in all weathers like a monstrous

scarecrow unless there was some great force behind him. Is it really faith that gives you strength to sit here? I never believed religion had so much power.

SIMEON. I shall not answer any questions. Believe me, your life seems as preposterous to me as mine does to you. A foolish round of senseless excitements, with a great fear and tiredness whispering in your heart. I suppose you think that a very wrong description?

EUDOCIA. No, Simeon, it is a very true one. I am both tired and afraid. After all, the path I have set myself is not particularly easy. You see, I have made up my mind to obtain all the success and power I can—in fact, life would be quite impossible otherwise—and those things are not to be had without some difficulties, are they? I am often afraid—and deadly tired.

SIMEON. Poor Eudocia. Suppose you alter your plan of life a little? See if that improves things.

EUDOCIA. Alter my plan of life? Simeon, I couldn't. Why, it's in my blood! I must live my life as I have planned it until I die.

SIMEON. Ah, well, I ought to have known.

EUDOCIA. But your faith, Simeon, and your magnificent perseverance fill my soul with an immense wonder. I no longer marvel at all the world talking of you and your disciples. It is unbelievable ; it is incomprehensible.

PROCLA [*suddenly*]. Oh, madam, madam, I believe I can see Georgius in the enclosure below!

EUDOCIA [*annoyed*]. Well, what if you can?

PROCLA. Yes, I can see him distinctly. He is wearing his blue cap with silver tassels, the one I gave him, madam, the one I gave him. He must have followed us!

EUDOCIA. Very probably.

PROCLA. Oh, it is delightful to see his dear, honest face again. I do so love his fat red cheeks. And it is sweet of

him to have come all this long way as well. Oh, I am overjoyed. Dear, dear Georgius!

EUDOCIA. Now we shall have no peace.

SIMEON. Take care the little fool does not lean out too far.

PROCLA. I must attract his attention, I must—these dates. [*Throws one.*] Oh, I missed him! [*Throws another.*] Oh, dear, oh, dear; Georgius! [*Date.*] Georgius! [*Date.*] Oh, I keep on hitting every one but Georgius! [*More dates.*] It is so tiresome—Georgius! Oh, he is moving away! He must see me before he goes—Georgius!

[*Empties the whole box over.*

EUDOCIA. Procla!

SIMEON. Of course, they'll think I've gone entirely mad.

PROCLA. Oh, that *did* attract him at last, he's looking up.

SIMEON. So is every one, I should imagine.

PROCLA. Georgius, Georgius, it's Procla, *your* Procla! I'm on the top of the column, just fancy! I'm sure he can't hear. It's *Procla*! Oh, he's waving his cap, he's recognized me, he's recognized me! Georgius, shall I see you to-night—to-night? What do you say? Oh, madam, I can't possibly hear him! Georgius——

SIMEON. Take her away, please take her away.

EUDOCIA. Come, Procla. [PROCLA *indulges in the wildest pantomime to* GEORGIUS *below.*] Simeon, farewell. You have triumphed, but I am glad. Pray sometimes for poor Eudocia.

SIMEON. Do you forgive me?

EUDOCIA. Forgive you?

SIMEON. Forgive me for being such a cruel disappointment to you, my dear.

EUDOCIA. Simeon— [*she kneels*] I think there can never be any talk of forgiveness between you and me. I shall always keep you in my thoughts.

SIMEON. And I shall always keep you in my heart.

PROCLA. Madam, Georgius is surrounded by a crowd laughing at him. He is getting angry, what shall I do? They will kill him, I know they will. Pray, madam, let us hurry off this dreadful column and try to save him.

[*Runs to the ladder.*

EUDOCIA. Yes, yes, we are going. Farewell, mighty Simeon, farewell.

SIMEON. Farewell, Eudocia.

[*She looks at him for a moment, then turns away.* SIMEON *also turns his head away. She puts her foot cautiously on the first rung of the ladder, then looks at him again, and on a second impulse blows him a kiss. Then she descends, followed by* PROCLA, *who punctuates her descent by shaking her fist at the crowd below.*

It is now dusk, and a few stars appear in the sky. SIMEON *opens his book.*

SIMEON [*reading*]. "When a woman cometh with smiles of joy, do thou——" [*He shuts up the book abruptly.*] It is dark, I cannot read; and besides, enough of women. . . . Poor Eudocia, would that you could live your life without fear and weariness . . . [*softly to himself*] and that all could live their lives without fear and weariness . . . without fear and weariness . . . [*He muses for a space.*

[*It grows darker, and a great rustling wind springs up; one hears it swirling round the column.* SIMEON *sits still, then he quietly half chants, half says:*

SIMEON. Even in the teeth of the storm, and amid the rustling of many winds rides fortitude, and patience has no need of any moon to light her way.

Out of the womb of the night shall come endurance, and fresh from the pools of hell arises faith.

Much shall be lost amid the roar of battle, but the precious thing endureth to the gates.

A STRANGE VOICE. Simeon, Simeon, sing merrily.

SIMEON. I do sing merrily, for my soul is uplifted by the night.

Joy shall come when the understanding has been strengthened, and peace shall heal the bitterness of the grave.

ANOTHER VOICE. Simeon, Simeon, sing a merrier song than that.

SIMEON. No merriment is worth having unless rooted in eternity, and, anyway, I shall sing as I please.

Those who anoint the dust with tears shall rise with gladness, they stand by the gates of death and know no fear.

A VOICE. Simeon, Simeon, cease caterwauling on top of your foolish column. Sing merrily.

SIMEON. I am singing merrily!

VOICE. Merrily!

[*A great burst of laughter shakes the column.*

A VOICE. You should be merrier than that, Simeon, you should be merrier than that.

SIMEON. Why?

VOICE. In honour of him who comes to visit you.

SIMEON. And who comes to visit me now?

MANY VOICES [*whispering*]. The devil comes to visit you, Simeon.

SIMEON. The devil! And is all this fuss and bother a sign that the devil is going to visit me? I never heard such nonsense. Why, I'm not in the least impressed. The devil has been before, the devil can come again. Where is he?

MANY VOICES [*softly and caressingly*]. He is coming, Simeon, he is coming.

SIMEON. Well, by all means let him come.

THE DEVIL [*appearing on the right-hand side of* SIMEON]. Thank you, Simeon, he has come.

[*The* DEVIL *is tall, young, and very good-looking, with a startling crop of bright red hair. He speaks softly and caressingly, and is dressed with a precious elegance. His* FRIEND *is a portly blackamoor, evidently in a shocking temper. Both are lit up brightly with a yellow light that reflects itself on* SIMEON. *The rest of the stage remains in darkness.*

SIMEON. Oh, good evening.

DEVIL. Good evening—er—my friend.

[BLACKAMOOR *bows.*

SIMEON. Ah, yes. [*Waves his hand.*] Any particular name?

DEVIL. No; I think not.

SIMEON. Well, I must say I prefer your appearance to-night to the last time we met.

DEVIL. Let me see, last time I was an old sailor, wasn't I?

SIMEON [*indignantly*]. No, you were a toad; a large toad.

DEVIL. Oh, yes, so I was! Most amusing. I remember your look of horror when I spoke.

SIMEON. It was extremely vulgar of you. I couldn't imagine how the toad got there to begin with, and then, when the thing deliberately engaged me in controversy——

DEVIL. Yes, yes, most amusing. Ha! Ha! [*To* FRIEND] You remember the little incident perhaps?

FRIEND. Do you suppose I remember all your idiotic pranks?

DEVIL. Well, anyway, it floored Simeon at first. Ha! Ha!

SIMEON. It was an exceedingly unfair thing to do.

DEVIL. Well, what else am I here for?

SIMEON. I don't know. At least, I'm sure I don't know what you are here for now. I've had enough of visitors for one day.

DEVIL. Ah, it's because of those visitors I came. I—that is—we——

FRIEND. Please leave me out of the conversation.

DEVIL. Very well. I—I am the last of your visitors. By the way, I sent the others, you know.

FRIEND. No, you didn't.

DEVIL. Well, I suggested to them that they might come.

FRIEND. No, you didn't. They were on their way here in any case.

DEVIL. Well, I suggested to them what they might say when they were here.

FRIEND. You tried to.

DEVIL. It had some effect.

FRIEND. I wonder.

DEVIL. Oh, it certainly had some effect! Didn't they all ask you to come down from the column?

SIMEON. They did. I grew to expect it.

DEVIL. Exactly, exactly. That, I'm happy to inform you, that was my idea. I told them to say that.

FRIEND. Conceited ape.

DEVIL. Hush. And what did you say, Simeon, in return?

SIMEON. I told them I should sit here for an immense period.

FRIEND. Was that also your suggestion?

DEVIL. No, that was his foolish habit of repeating himself. A well-known symptom of senility.

SIMEON. Senile or not, I at least had strength to send them away without their having had the faintest effect on me.

DEVIL [*smiling sweetly at him*]. Simeon, say that is a lie.

SIMEON. Eh?

DEVIL. Oh, nothing, nothing! I thought the little phrase might refresh your memory, that's all.

SIMEON. I don't know what you mean.

DEVIL. Oh, yes, you do! [*To* FRIEND] I'm managing this rather neatly.

FRIEND. Nonsense. I've rarely seen you so clumsy.

DEVIL. To say they had no effect on you and to remember —er—Eudocia—— Oh, really, Simeon, oh, fie, fie! Oh, really! Pooh! Why, Sedulius with his wandering roads and various colour schemes made some impression, and the King's persuasion was not entirely without force, but when we come to Eudocia——

SIMEON [*roused*]. Silence, you contemptible little whipper-snapper!

FRIEND. There! That's what you get for being rude.

DEVIL. Shocking, isn't it? Especially coming from a saint. And shows such a lack of proportion. My dear man, to call the devil names is customary enough, but to dub him a contemptible little whipper-snapper is just—foolish; nothing more. It shows you completely at the mercy of my make-up.

SIMEON. Hang your make-up. Don't you mention Eudocia again.

DEVIL. So sorry to touch on a sore point. [*To* FRIEND] Dear me, she *did* affect him.

SIMEON. Affect me or not, Eudocia is nothing to do with you.

DEVIL. Do you really think so? [*Smiles.*] Now I have another theory.

SIMEON. Don't imagine you'll ever get Eudocia completely under your thumb, you—you mass of miserable vulgarity. She has too much sense of beauty.

DEVIL. That remains to be seen. As for a sense of beauty, that surely is my special prerogative.

FRIEND. Colossal conceit! And he's right in what he says about Eudocia.

DEVIL. I tell you that remains to be seen; I wish you would practise silence. Simeon, you're an old fool.

SIMEON. Doubtless.

DEVIL. You're the laughing-stock of heaven and hell. Above or below, when they want a prime joke they mention Saint Simeon. That's quite enough to put the whole place in an uproar.

SIMEON. Really.

DEVIL. But apart from all the laughter, and the huge joke of it, it is perfectly well known that not only are you an old fool, you are also a wretchedly wicked fool. A vast, monstrous, blasphemous criminal. Your life is an outrage to God and man, your soul is an abomination to heaven and hell. You are twice damned.

SIMEON [*a little astounded*]. Why? Why?

DEVIL. Because of your pride, your vast, overwhelming pride. You and your disciples—for your example is beginning to affect many—perform this monstrous act of penance, this useless, interminable squatting in all weathers and seasons on the top of a column, because you actually believe that it makes you more pleasing to God than other men; that—good gracious!—by this outrageous performance you are completely sanctified, are raised above the common herd, obtain a special salvation and are vessels set apart for the reception of heavenly grace—and in the sight of all men; mark my words, in the sight of all men. Yours is no penance that retires from the world and shuns advertisement; yours is not the modesty that flies from praise and adulation. No; in the sight of all men, as publicly as possible, you sit here in a blaze of fictitious glory; utterly useless, utterly sterile, filled with a vice that shrieks to heaven for punishment, chained down to this column by an indomitable, blasphemous, raging, relentless pride.

SIMEON. By an indomitable, relentless habit.

DEVIL. What?

SIMEON. Habit. You marvel at my faith, my useless

perseverance, my pride. I tell you it is *not* faith, it is not perseverance, it is not pride. It is just—habit. Why, I would come down from the column if I could. I might join Sedulius on the winding roads, I might help the King of Vararanes rebuild his kingdom, and I should certainly seek out Eudocia and be with her—poor child—if I could, if I could. But I am bound, chained to this column by the habit of a lifetime. I could not leave it if I wanted to. The people who visit me are holier than I; any old market-woman with a drunken husband and a brood of children, without an idea in her head save a struggle for food and money, is a greater saint than I. But in an overwhelming burst of youthful zeal I began this life and now, whether it is a mistake or not, whether it is useless or no, I cannot give it up. I am unfit for any other life. I shall sit here for an immense period. . . . You should have come when I really believed in it all, when I was new to it.

DEVIL. But, bless me, that's just when it's most difficult to get hold of people.

SIMEON. Well, now it's too late. The habit is formed, my whole life is fixed.

DEVIL. I don't believe it. Habit is not so serious as all that.

SIMEON. Ask Sedulius to give up his journeyings, ask the King of Vararanes to laugh and see beauty in the hearts of men, ask Eudocia—only don't you dare—to give up her struggle for power, and see what they will say.

DEVIL. Pooh! People change.

SIMEON. Alter a man's life by some sudden accident, and see how soon he'll get back to his old ways. Knock down my column to-night; within a month you'll find me sitting on top of another. And now go. I'm thoroughly tired, and in no mood for further conversation. Go and worry my disciples, you say I have some. I suppose there is always

some one ready to imitate something. Go and see what they say to you, but don't stop here. I am tired out.

DEVIL. Simeon, I hold that——

FRIEND. Oh, we're not going to talk on this draughty column all night! Can't you see the old fool means what he says? It may not be true, but it's true for him, and that's as far as you'll ever get.

DEVIL. Nevertheless, I have much to——

FRIEND. Nonsense! You talk and talk until I'm worn to a shadow listening. Every one likes to hear you talk, but no one likes to see you win, and so it goes on. It's no pleasure to be a friend of yours, I can tell you. And now, come along. I suppose you've got some other wretched visits to pay to-night. You'd better be starting on your round.

DEVIL. You have no right to talk to me like this. I will not tolerate it.

FRIEND. Well, you've no right to drag me with you to see you make such a sickening fool of yourself. You never quite succeed in anything.

DEVIL. You know perfectly well that my successes are perpetual.

FRIEND. I deny that. I——

SIMEON. Well, let him think so if it pleases him. Only go away.

DEVIL [*loudly, raising his arm in a tremendous gesture, and with sudden fury*]. I swear by everything tremendous in heaven and hell that despite all failures—[*suddenly smiling sweetly on them both*] I, at least, gentlemen, am eternal.

FRIEND. And even that remains to be seen. Oh, do come along and put an end to these heroics!

DEVIL. As I said before, you have no right to talk to me like this. And the more I see of you the more lumpish, silly, and awkward you appear, while your beastly colour——

FRIEND. *Colour!* Would you prefer me to look like a piece of underdone beef? Any remark about my complexion is an insult.

DEVIL. And any doubt as to my power is an insult. In fact, I certainly—— [*They fade away, quarrelling.*

[*Deep silence. A faint, clear light, as of a quarter-moon, illuminates the stage.*

SIMEON [*sighing heavily*]. Ah, well! What an exhausting afternoon! I really think, though, they've all gone at last.

At the end of tribulation shall come a great silence, and from the heart of the silence a healing peace.

Out of the darkness shall arise a—— Oh, Eudocia, poor child, why did you visit me when it was too late? . . . I must get to sleep . . . to sleep. [*Closes his eyes, then murmurs:*] I shall sit here for an immense period. . . .

[*Silence.*

CURTAIN

THE PATCHWORK QUILT

A FANTASY IN ONE ACT

By Rachel Lyman Field

CHARACTERS

Old Mrs Willis
Anne Wendall, *her daughter*
Joe Wendall, *Anne's husband*
Betty, *their daughter*

In the Fantasy [1]
Molly
William
Emily

[1] Here the character of Emily may be doubled with Betty, the same child playing both parts if necessary. Two different actresses may play Molly at twenty and at twenty-seven, but they should look alike, and it is better to have one person play both parts, even though a quick change is required.

" Lightly comic, gently touching, or whimsically pathetic "—such are the comments of Professor George P. Baker on the plays of Rachel Lyman Field. It is, indeed, a proof of the high status of the one-act play that a dramatist of Miss Field's accomplishment should have confined herself to the one-act form. In America her " Three Pills in a Bottle " is a strong favourite, yet, though Professor Baker calls it a play of unusual acting quality, it seems to the present editor that " The Patchwork Quilt " is likely to be preferred by English readers. " Cinderella Married " is an ambitious theme, and is handled with great tenderness.

THE PATCHWORK QUILT[1]

SCENE: *An upstairs bedroom and sitting-room combined, of a modern city house, which has been 'done over' recently. The mahogany furniture somehow fails to give the impression of antiquity that the decorator probably intended. We know at a glance that none of it has been much lived upon, and the conventional angles at which the chairs are arranged accentuate this feeling of newness. Several good prints, in subdued tones, hang on the walls, but the only picture which seems to be a personal belonging is a portrait in an oval gold frame over the fireplace. This is the likeness, in old-fashioned pastel, of a little girl of six, round-eyed and serious, with the smooth ringlets and low-necked dress of forty years ago. A coal-fire burns in the grate. It is late afternoon.*

When the curtain rises old MRS WILLIS *is wandering aimlessly about the room. She goes from one article of furniture to another, fingering each carefully, and then moving on to another as if she were searching for something that should feel familiar to her fingers. She is a frail old lady in obviously new and handsome black clothes, in which she seems tiny and out of place. Over her face there is a film of daze and bewilderment.*

She has reached the bed, and is fingering a grey silk puff lying there, turning it over and over with obvious disappoint-

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

ment, when JOE WENDALL *and his wife,* ANNE, *enter. The former is in the forties, well dressed, with a stubborn chin and the keen, practical face of a business-man. The woman is rather pretty in a nervous, twentieth-century sort of way. She wears a smart afternoon dress, and is removing her hat and gloves as she enters.*

ANNE [*to her husband, indicating* MRS WILLIS]. There, Joe, you can see for yourself the state she's in! [*Going to the old lady*] Oh, Mother, do sit down, and don't keep fidgeting so! [*Old* MRS WILLIS *looks at her in bewilderment. She makes no answer, and her daughter speaks again, more loudly this time, though with an effort at kindness.*] What are you looking for?

MRS WILLIS [*turning from one to the other blankly*]. I'm very sorry to disturb you, but I'm looking for my room. I seem to have lost the way.

ANNE [*to* JOE]. Just as I told you. This is one of her bad days! [*Speaking in loud, simple tones as if to a child*] Why, this is your room, Mother, you've just forgotten again——

MRS WILLIS [*polite but firm*]. Oh, no, I wouldn't have forgotten my own room, not after so many years—such a pretty one, too, with a table and six carved chairs. [*Proudly*] They came from Boston—and a beautiful patchwork quilt.

JOE [*with irritation*]. Can't you stop her, Anne? It's hopeless once she gets started on that old quilt.

MRS WILLIS [*nodding to herself*]. There's not another one like it anywheres round. I always said the rainbow itself wasn't a mite prettier'n my patchwork quilt!

ANNE. Oh, Mother, you're all mixed up again—you're in your room at my house. [*Leading her over to a chair*] Now, you sit down here by the fire, and try very hard to listen to what Joe and I ask you.

MRS WILLIS [*feeling of the chair*]. This chair isn't mine! It's got plain legs—mine had carved ones——

JOE [*helping* ANNE *out*]. What's the matter with these chairs? I think Anne's fixed you up a real pretty room.

MRS WILLIS [*blankly*]. Anne—Anne isn't here any more. [*She looks plaintively from one to the other.*] I can't just remember what happened, but she isn't here any more. Emily's all I've got now.

ANNE [*to* JOE]. You see, she doesn't even know me!

JOE [*shortly*]. Must be a real cheerful feeling!

ANNE. Don't, Joe, I'm worried enough with this business about the farm.

MRS WILLIS [*repeating wistfully*]. Yes, Emily's all I've got now—— [*She points to the picture over the mantle.*]

ANNE [*turning again to her, and speaking wearily*]. Why, Mother, don't you remember that Emily's dead? [*Leaning over her and speaking distinctly*] She's been dead for over forty years.

MRS WILLIS [*trembling a little*]. Emily—dead? Why, she couldn't be. She comes to see me real often—she's the only one of my children that does now——

ANNE [*to* JOE]. You can see how she's failed the last month, Joe.

JOE. Yes, don't see how we'll get anything out of her in time.

ANNE [*to* JOE]. Just leave her to herself for a few minutes; it may bring her round.

[*They move away from the old lady, who sits in her chair by the fire, staring straight before her, and occasionally feeling the chair-legs hopefully, to sink back again disappointed at their plain surfaces.*

JOE [*turning to* ANNE *with an air of finality*]. Look here,

Anne, are you sure that deed isn't with her things somewhere?

ANNE [*impatiently*]. Of course it isn't, Joe, you know I went through everything when we had the room done over.

JOE. Still, I always said you made a mistake clearing out all her junk wholesale like that. We might——

ANNE [*interrupting*]. You know I couldn't have stood those old moth-eaten things another day! It wasn't as if the furniture had been really good, either—that ghastly walnut and horsehair and a patchwork quilt with all the colours of the rainbow swearing at each other! [*On the defensive*] And I didn't send everything away—there's Emily's picture—the decorator said it had nice colouring.

JOE [*worried*]. Well, I don't give a darn what the fool decorator said, it's that deed I'm after, and we've got to find out where she keeps it.

ANNE. But, Joe, they must have a record at Green River.

JOE [*pulling out an envelope*]. Heard this morning—seems things got all mixed up there after the town-hall burned down. A lot of the old books and records were lost, and it's going to take months to straighten out all the boundaries and claims. It may not even have been registered. They thought, of course, that we had the deed to Mother's place. In that case it would be easy enough.

ANNE. Well, but didn't you explain it to Mr Jenkins?

JOE. Of course I did! But you know what he is—says he'll take Mother's place at our price, house, woodland, and all if the title's clear and the sale can go right through.

ANNE. But he'll give us a few days more surely?

JOE. Not Jenkins. He's made up his mind to start right in on the hotel plans—unless the ground's broken before frost sets in all the building will have to wait till next year, and he says that rather than do that he'll take the Thompson

place five miles north, though the view doesn't compare with ours.

ANNE [*eagerly*]. We could let him start in work right away and get the deed later.

JOE [*flinging out his hands with an irritated gesture*]. But can't you see, Anne, legally we don't own that place Of course everybody knows the farm belongs to your mother, but we can't prove it without that blamed piece of paper!

ANNE [*earnestly*]. Oh, Joe, we've got to put that sale through somehow! Why, think what it would mean to us——

JOE [*gloomily*]. Do you suppose I've been thinking of anything else all week? If he takes the Thompson place everybody'll buy at that end of the town and our land will go way down in value.

ANNE. We must find that deed! Think of all we could do with the money the place would bring. We could buy that stucco house in Wildwood Park that you said we couldn't afford, and go abroad for next summer, and get a Cadillac instead of the Ford *coupé*.

JOE. Say, Anne, if you'd get her talking instead of spending money maybe we won't ever get hold of——

ANNE. All right, I'll try again—[*with a little sigh*] and we could have a French governess for Betty just like the Lawrences', or maybe that new boarding-school would be better——

JOE. Oh, Betty's all right. Funny, the way she and your mother seem to hit it off.

ANNE. But, Joe, I don't think it's good for her to see anyone whose mind wanders so. [*Going towards* MRS WILLIS, *who is sitting just where they left her, staring before her in a subdued, unhappy way*] Now, Mother, we want you to try and remember about the farm.

MRS WILLIS [*rousing for the first time at the last word*]. The farm—yes—you have to climb the hill to get there, right on top it is. There's lilacs by the door, and you can look out over four counties from the front porch.

JOE [*encouraged*]. There, she does remember. [*To* MRS WILLIS] Now about the deed, you must have had one. You know, a paper that says the farm belongs to you.

MRS WILLIS [*reminiscently*]. White laylocks, they are——

ANNE [*urging*]. The deed, Mother, try to remember where it is.

MRS WILLIS [*her face wrinkling with the effort to remember*]. I don't know—everything's got all tangled up in my head, like a ball o' yarn——

JOE [*speaking slowly and distinctly*]. Listen to me, Mother —a little piece of paper with a red seal—that's what we want. And it says that the farm and woodland belong to you—you must have put it somewhere?

MRS WILLIS [*now hopelessly bewildered*]. Maybe if Emily would come she'd tell you what you want to know—but you said she's—she's—— [*Her voice trails away plaintively.*]

ANNE [*trying to draw her out*]. You told me once that Father gave it to you on your wedding-day—don't you remember?

MRS WILLIS [*feeling of the chair, and rising to go to the table*]. I want my carved chairs, and my table with the scratches on it. [*Smiling to herself at some remembrance of her own*] Anne, she always would smuggle her kitten in to meals with her—that's how the scratches come to be there. I like to sit and feel them when I'm all alone.

ANNE [*turning to* JOE]. It's no use when she gets all worked up like this.

MRS WILLIS [*by the bed, her voice rising in agitation*]. It isn't here—some one's taken my quilt!

JOE [*to* ANNE]. Good Lord, she's started on that again!

Well, I guess it isn't much use, and I've got to let Jenkins know by to-night.

ANNE. She may quiet down if we leave her here awhile. Sometimes she acts quite like herself.

JOE [*with a shrug*]. All right, I'll take another look through those papers we kept from her desk—might give me a clue.

ANNE [*to* MRS WILLIS]. Sit down again, Mother. [*Helping her to the chair again.*] That's better, now you'll try and remember about the paper—folded up small with sealing-wax on it. Joe and I'll come back soon.

MRS WILLIS [*wearily*]. I'll try—but if I could have my chairs and my quilt——

ANNE [*to* JOE *at the door*]. You fixed it all up with the lawyer so her signature won't be necessary?

JOE. Yes, she's not really responsible any more, and it's lucky in this case, for she'd never let the old place go, not the way she hangs on to things.

ANNE. That sale simply must go through, Joe.

[*They go out, and* MRS WILLIS *stares after them wonderingly.*

MRS WILLIS [*shaking her head*]. Those people wanted something—something they thought I had. [*Wistfully*] I don't know what it's all about. [*She begins to whimper a little brokenly to herself.*] They're all gone, and I've looked everywhere for 'em—my carved chairs, and my patchwork quilt, and Emily's gone, too——

[*She cries softly in the slowly darkening room. Twilight is coming, and save for the firelight the room seems stiff and cheerless. Suddenly the door bursts open, and a merry little girl of six or seven bounds in, her arms filled with an old patchwork quilt whose folds trail after her. She runs towards the old lady eagerly.*

BETTY. Look what I found, Grandma!

[MRS WILLIS *turns, rising with incredulous joy at sight of the quilt.*

MRS WILLIS [*trembling a little*]. Then it isn't lost—Betty, you've brought Grandma's patchwork quilt back to her——

BETTY. But it was on Katy the cook's bed.

MRS WILLIS [*gathering the quilt in her arms, pressing its familiar folds close*]. My patchwork quilt—mine—mine——

BETTY. It's got so many colours in it, not just one like the kind Mother buys, [*fingering it with interest*] and it's pretty.

MRS WILLIS [*softly*]. It's beautiful.

BETTY [*wonderingly*]. You're crying on it.

MRS WILLIS [*in soft, sure tones, the dazed look beginning to slip from her face*]. It's all coming back to me now.

BETTY [*curiously*]. What's coming back, Grandma? [*Bending over the quilt*] I don't see anything.

[MRS WILLIS *moves to the chair by the fire, sinking into it contentedly and spreading the gay maze of colour over her knees. The firelight falls warmly on the little squares, as she fingers them with the eager greeting reserved only for old friends.*

MRS WILLIS. There's that blue piece that came from Mother's old winter cashmere—she always got it out come the first of November and wore it till March, excepting her best black on Sundays and her second best for afternoons.

BETTY [*bending over to see*]. Which one, Grandma?

MRS WILLIS [*finding another*]. And this is from my first party-dress.

BETTY [*in surprise*]. Why, Grandma, did you go to parties, real ones?

MRS WILLIS [*nodding*]. Never missed one—— A green silk this dress was, with a black sash and white tatting collar. William always liked me in green——

BETTY. Who was William?

MRS WILLIS [*tenderly*]. William was your grandfather.

[*Suddenly she goes on speaking with a kind of slow revelation.*] Why, every one of them is bringing me back something—a day, or the folks I knew and have been wanting—— [*Lifting up her head triumphantly*] Things are getting just as clear, nothing's mixed up any more now I've got back my quilt!

BETTY [*who has been examining it*]. Here's a pretty square with pink flowers on it!

MRS WILLIS [*pleased*]. Well, I declare, if I hadn't clean forgotten that! 'Twas a bit of ribbon Great-Aunt Dolly brought me clear from Paris.

BETTY. I've got a hat that came from Paris—it tickles my ears.

MRS WILLIS. I had a time piecin' that square to fit, but the ribbon's hardly frayed a mite.

BETTY. And here's a little yellow one—what was that, Grandma?

MRS WILLIS [*touching it fondly*]. That was a piece from Emily's best dress.

BETTY [*surprised*]. Aunt Emily in the picture up there? [*Pointing to it.*]

MRS WILLIS. Yes, she had it on in that picture, only it didn't show as much as she hoped it would. [*Reminiscently*] William bought that dress for her in Portland the day she was six—'twas all hand-made and very dear. I scolded him for paying so much, but he could never do enough for Emily.

BETTY [*studying the picture*]. And did Aunt Emily like it?

MRS WILLIS. She couldn't wait every afternoon till I'd get through my work, so I could dress her in it and curl her hair. Then she'd sit down in her little chair side of me while I did my sewing. [*Thoughtfully*] Making this very quilt I was then. [*After a moment's pause she goes on*

as if she were seeing it all over again.] Sometimes I'd baste on a square and let her sew it. She thought she was a real, grown-up lady then, and she was just as proud——

BETTY [*eagerly*]. Oh, I want to see the ones Aunt Emily sewed—which ones, Grandma?

MRS WILLIS [*thoughtfully*]. Let me see—about half-way through I was, and her stitches were pretty big and crooked, but I never did have the heart to rip them out.

BETTY [*excitedly*]. There! all round that big white piece in the middle—look, they're just as wobbly, like mountains and valleys in my geography.

MRS WILLIS [*with a little gasp*]. The white square in the middle, yes—— [*Rubbing her forehead thoughtfully.*] There was something about it. It meant more than the others, that's why I let Emily sew it—— [*Her voice trails off softly.*] Something about the white piece that made me happy.

[*She sits smoothing the white square, when a voice outside calls "Betty! Betty!" The child rises and starts towards the door.*

BETTY. I've got to go to supper now, Grandma, but I'll come back when you've remembered all about the white one——

MRS WILLIS [*repeating softly*]. The white one——

[*She bends over and kisses it as if it were alive. Suddenly from the dimness of the room a figure appears. As the firelight falls on it we see it is a lovely young girl, wearing a heavy white satin dress in the style of fifty years ago. Her face is flower-like, just what old* MRS WILLIS'S *might have been at twenty. Over her hair is a draping of old lace. At sight of her* MRS WILLIS *leans forward in her chair, speaking with soft wonder.*

MRS WILLIS. My wedding-dress—and why, why, I couldn't have looked as pretty as all that!

[*The girl looks about her, then beckons eagerly to some one behind her, speaking in happy, excited tones.*

GIRL. It's all right, William, there's no one here.

[*Another figure steps out of the shadows, a straight, boyish one this time, clad in the tight grey trousers and neat black braid-trimmed coat of the period. His eyes are luminous with suppressed emotions, and his face pale. In his hands he carries a bouquet of white lilacs tied with a long shimmering ribbon. At sight of him old* MRS WILLIS *gives a little cry, and holds out her arms to him, but neither he nor the girl is aware of her presence, being completely absorbed in each other.*

WILLIAM [*eagerly*]. Molly, I thought they'd never let me see you——

MOLLY. I know—sister said she never saw a bridegroom behave the way you do, but I don't care, there never was one like you, anyway, and I wanted to see you too, before—— [*Catching at his sleeve*] I've been worrying so, thinking about all the things that might happen—how you *might* forget the flowers, or the ring *might* fall out of your pocket and you not know till the minister asked for it—and how could we ever be married then?

WILLIAM [*touching his pocket*]. It's all safe, and I didn't forget the flowers—— [*He holds out the lilacs, and she takes them with a little cry—burying her face in them.*]

MOLLY. Oh, William, I knew you'd remember about the lilacs—Mother thought you'd bring lilies of the valley, but I knew better—— And these came from the old Todd place I know, because they're sweeter and whiter than any others. [*Shyly*] Or maybe I just think so because it was up there that we—that you said——

WILLIAM [*bending over her*]. What I'm saying now and

every minute of the day—that I love you—I love you, Molly. [*There is a pause for a moment as she slips into his arms. Then he goes on softly.*] I was up before light this morning, I couldn't sleep for knowing what day it was, so I went up the hill to the old Todd place to pick these before they opened too far. The bush was full of them all nodding away in the wind, and when I came up close a thrush flew right up out of it and began to sing, just as if it knew——

MOLLY [*softly*]. About us? I wouldn't wonder . . . that old lilac-bush must have heard you last fall when you asked me. [*Touching the flowers fondly*] Maybe these very flowers were listening—maybe they hoped they'd come to our wedding!

WILLIAM [*a little awkwardly*]. You look sort of like them to-day, Molly—I—I'm glad they let me see you first, before the others. You didn't mind?

MOLLY. I wanted you to, [*smoothing her dress*] and I'm glad you think it's pretty—wasn't it good of Aunt Dolly to give it to me? It isn't every bride has a satin that can stand alone!

WILLIAM [*smiling at her*]. But I don't want it to stand alone—I want you to be in it!

MOLLY [*listening*]. There goes the knocker! Oh, William, they're beginning to come!

WILLIAM [*earnestly*]. Molly, maybe you thought it was queer I didn't give you a ring to wear before now——

MOLLY [*simply*]. I didn't need to have a ring to know you loved me.

WILLIAM. But I've brought you something, Molly, you can't wear it, but I wanted you to have it before we're married, something you're to keep for always.

[*He fumbles in his pocket and draws out a thin, folded paper with a seal.*

MOLLY [*excitedly*]. Oh, William, what is it? It's too dark in here to read—what does it say?

WILLIAM. It says that the old Todd place is going to have a new owner—it's going to be yours from now on.

MOLLY. Mine—mine—oh, William! [*She buries her head against his coat, and he pats her hair tenderly, lifting up her face gently.*]

WILLIAM. There, I've gone and mussed your hair, and your sister'll scold me, for I promised her not to touch you.

MOLLY [*smiling up at him radiantly*]. Is it really mine—for always?

WILLIAM. For always.

[*At this old* MRS WILLIS *cannot contain herself any longer, and she leans forward in her chair, speaking to him earnestly.*

MRS WILLIS. And I've never let anyone else have it, William, I've always tried—— [*But neither of them hears the old lady.*]

[MOLLY *takes the paper and kisses it, then she tucks it into the satin bodice of her dress, hiding it safely away out of sight.*

MOLLY [*turning with a smile to* WILLIAM]. There, I can wear it, William! All the time the minister is marrying us I'll feel it lying there, and it'll be just as if I were wearing the house and the lilac-bushes and the view of the four counties—only no one will know except you and me!

WILLIAM. We'll know, dear.

MOLLY. And I think I shall always keep it wrapped up in my wedding satin, even when I'm too old to wear it any more.

WILLIAM [*listening*]. I can hear them talking downstairs. It must be nearly time——

MOLLY [*suddenly clinging to him*]. Oh, William, hold me close, never mind if you do rumple me—I'm afraid.

WILLIAM. Afraid, why, dear?

MOLLY. I don't know, I just am—sometimes—you know—it's all the things that may be going to happen to us and our house——

WILLIAM [*gently correcting her*]. *Your* house, dear.

MOLLY. But I'll be growing old, dear, some time. I woke up in the night thinking about it, and I felt cold and afraid, and you weren't there to tell me everything was all right.

WILLIAM [*comfortingly*]. I'm here now, and everything is all right—we're going to be married. Come, they're calling you.

MOLLY [*touching the bodice of her dress*]. It's here, William—it's all safe and warm——

[*They fade into the gloom again, leaving old* MRS WILLIS *alone by the fire, the quilt still over her knees. She looks at the place where the two have stood with an expression of longing, and, stretching out her arms, whispers.*

MRS WILLIS. Oh, William, say it again—say everything's all right—I'm here all alone——

[*Then she bends over the quilt again, fingering the square in the centre. The fire flares up a little, and other figures approach her. This time it is an older Molly, a serene and beautiful young woman of twenty-seven, wearing a full dress of figured green material. Her face is more thoughtful, and her hair is worn in a smooth, forgotten fashion. She carries a great bag of sewing on her arm, and leads along a tiny child—a little girl with round, serious eyes and smooth ringlets, exactly like the child in the portrait. Her quaint, low-necked dress is buttercup yellow, and she wears it with childish satisfaction.*

MRS WILLIS [*half rising from her chair and stretching out her arms with a low cry*]. Emily!

[*The two settle themselves near the fire.* EMILY *on a low footstool by her mother's chair.*

MOLLY. Come, dear, let's sit up close to the fire.

EMILY. Does the fire like to see me in my yellow dress?

MOLLY [*smiling*]. Not as much as Father does.

EMILY [*chuckling*]. No, because the fire sticks out red tongues at me, and Father doesn't—he always kisses me.

MOLLY. Then I must sew ever so many squares before he gets home, so he will kiss me too!

[*She takes out some patchwork squares stitched together, and begins to sew.* EMILY *watches her intently.*

EMILY. Why are your eyes all shiny, Mother, just like before a party?

MOLLY [*patting the square she is at work on*]. Because I've come to the centre of my quilt—see.

EMILY [*touching it*]. What a funny big white square! Why isn't it pretty like the other ones?

MOLLY. I love it more than all the rest.

EMILY. I like the coloured ones better. Why don't you?

MOLLY. Because— [*smiling to herself*] it was a piece of the dress I wore when Father and I were married.

EMILY [*eagerly*]. Was I there?

MOLLY [*smiling at her tenderly*]. No, dear, I didn't know you then.

EMILY [*wonderingly*]. Didn't you? I've always known you. [*After a pause*] I wish I had been there. What makes you put the white patch in the middle?

MOLLY. Because the patch I love best must go there, and— [*smiling mysteriously*] there's a secret about it.

EMILY. Does Father know the secret too?

MOLLY. Yes, and some time I'll tell you—when you're grown up.

EMILY [*disappointed*]. But that's a long way off.

MOLLY [*with vague dread*]. A long, long way off, dear.

EMILY. Let's call the white patch Best-of-all because it's got a secret.

MOLLY. Yes, we will, and we'll remember how precious it is—that's why no one must ever have the quilt except Mother.

EMILY. What does the secret look like?

MOLLY [*smiling*]. You see it every day whenever you run around the house or pick me lilacs in the spring, or look out over hills to the four counties.

EMILY [*in surprise*]. My, not all that in such a little square? [*She bends over it curiously.*]

MOLLY [*happily*]. Yes, it's all there, but only Father and I know——

EMILY. And me—only I can't see any house or hills or anything——

MOLLY [*kissing her*]. Some day you will, darling, and you'll love it just as Mother does.

EMILY. I want to sew on the secret patch.

MOLLY [*hesitating*]. Well—perhaps—I was going to do it myself because we must be very careful—it's such a precious one.

EMILY. I'll be just as careful and take the littlest stitches.

MOLLY [*putting it in her hands*]. There, in and out, where I've basted it, and be sure to pull the thread tight every time so there won't be a single loose stitch. [EMILY *sets to work seriously, and with a will.*]

[*As her fingers touch the satin she hears something and puts her ear close to the square to listen.*

EMILY. Why—it *crackles*! Is that what makes it so precious, Mother?

MOLLY. Yes, dear.

EMILY [*seriously*]. Well, I think the white patch would like me to be wearing your gold thimble.

MOLLY [*slipping it from her finger to the child's with a smile*]. Here it is then, but be careful.

EMILY. I will—and won't Father be surprised to see me sewing just like a real grown-up lady?

MOLLY. I think I hear him now stamping the snow off his boots at the back door. I'll go and tell him to come in and see who's making me a call!

[EMILY *chuckles joyously at this, and sews very hard, while* MOLLY *rises and slips away. Old* MRS WILLIS *leans forward, stretching out her arms to the child appealingly. Then* EMILY *too slips off into the gloom. At the same moment voices sound near by, and presently the electric lights are turned on, revealing* ANNE *and* JOE. *The sudden light dazzles old* MRS WILLIS, *and she sits still with the quilt spread all about her, a mass of jumbled colour.*

ANNE [*with an exclamation of annoyance*]. Oh, that dreadful quilt! I thought I'd seen the last of it! Where in the world was that unearthed?

[*At this moment* BETTY *enters, running past her parents, and throwing herself eagerly on her grandmother and the quilt.*

BETTY. Oh, Grandma, I've got just five minutes before I have to go to bed, and you said you'd tell me about the white square!

MRS WILLIS [*stroking it*]. It—it's very precious, and it's a secret——

ANNE [*intervening*]. Betty, you must go right to your room. Don't ask Grandma a single question.

BETTY. Just about the quilt, Mother?

ANNE [*touching it*]. No, and I'm sure I don't know where you found it.

BETTY [*hurriedly*]. It was in Katy's room, but I wanted it on my bed. It's pretty and Grandma made it, and there's one patch that came from Paris.

ANNE. No, dear, you must take this right back to Katy's room. You have a nice pink one for your bed.

MRS WILLIS [*nervously rousing herself*]. You won't take my quilt away. I've been wanting it for a long time.

BETTY. Just let Grandma tell me about this one, Mother? [*Pointing to the white patch in the middle.*]

JOE [*firmly*]. No, Betty, take it away now. Mother and I want to talk to Grandma.

[ANNE *gathers it quickly out of old* MRS WILLIS's *clinging fingers, piling it into the child's arms.*

MRS WILLIS [*protesting weakly*]. It's my quilt, Anne, and I want it, won't you let me keep it? There isn't another one like it anywhere——

ANNE. Why, Mother, I couldn't think of such a thing, not after the cook's had it on her bed, and when you've got such a pretty grey one! Here, Betty, take it to Katy and then go to bed.

[BETTY *moves towards the door reluctantly, the quilt in her arms. Old* MRS WILLIS *rises once, trying to make a last effort to rescue the quilt, and giving a last little despairing gasp of protest. But* ANNE *leads her firmly back to the chair by the fire.* BETTY *pauses by the door, fingering the white square. As she does so she gives a surprised start, putting her ear down close to it.*

BETTY. Why—it *crackles*!

[ANNE *waves her off, closing the door on child and quilt.* JOE *has already started on the old subject.*

JOE. Have you been trying to remember, Mother, about the deed of the old place?

MRS WILLIS [*plaintively*]. Every square was a piece out of the past to me, and you won't let me have it.

ANNE. Now listen to Joe, Mother, it's just one little thing we want.

JOE. Try to think—the paper they gave you the day you were married.

MRS WILLIS [*looks from one to the other blankly. The film of daze has begun to spread over her face again, and she murmurs vaguely*]. The white square in the centre—I liked it the best—I don't remember why—— [*Her voice trails off incoherently.*]

[*After a moment's uncertainty the old lady rises and resumes her occupation of roaming from one piece of furniture to another, feeling the chair-legs and the table-top.*

ANNE [*to* JOE]. It's absolutely no use, Joe, not when she starts on that quilt.

JOE [*gloomily*]. Well, I guess we'll have that old place on our hands till we're a hundred!

[*The two go out, and old* MRS WILLIS *moves patiently about from one thing to another as she did at the beginning of the play. At last she reaches the bed, where she bends down to finger the grey silk puff.*

MRS WILLIS [*to herself*]. It's all grey now.

[*She shakes her head a little wearily, and stares straight before her.*

CURTAIN

FIVE BIRDS IN A CAGE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By Gertrude Jennings

CHARACTERS

Susan, the Duchess of Wiltshire
Leonard, Lord Porth
Nelly, *a milliner's assistant*
Bert, *a workman*
Horace, *the liftman*

Originally produced by Mr Frederick Harrison at a *matinée* performance at the Haymarket Theatre, London, on Friday, March 19, 1915, with the following cast of characters:

Susan	Helen Haye
Leonard	Allan Aynesworth
Nelly	Marie Löhr
Bert	Godfrey Tearle
Horace	Gordon Harker

The play went into the evening bill on Tuesday, April 20, 1915, with the following cast:

Susan	Ellis Jeffreys
Leonard	H. R. Hignett
Nelly	Maud Bell
Bert	Godfrey Tearle
Horace	Gordon Harker

Miss Gertrude Jennings is a prolific writer of one-act plays, and is immensely popular for a multitude of reasons. No humorist is more fully aware than she that people begin to be comic when they get into an awkward predicament, and as the situation becomes more and more hopeless the fun grows more furious. Her characters are clearly defined, and usually broadly contrasted in temperament as well as in social position. The scenes are invariably plausible incidents in present-day life, and Miss Jennings intensifies effects and adds a touch of farce. Her play "Between the Soup and the Savoury," which was included in the third series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*, has pathos as well as laughter. "The Young Person in Pink" is the best known of her longer plays.

FIVE BIRDS IN A CAGE[1]

The scene represents a tube lift, broadside on. The wall is covered with framed advertisements, and has a bench running along it. The gates, one at each end, are set at an angle. There is an electric light in the ceiling (C.), and two oil-lamps hang on nails near each gate. The lift measures 8 feet deep by 17 feet wide. Any difficulty with regard to gates can be overcome by obtaining two pieces of garden trellis painted black, or by nailing long narrow laths of wood criss-cross. The left-hand gate should be made to open. The two backings outside the gates (representing the funnel of the tube) should be neutral in colour. The unpainted back of a scene answers the purpose. When the curtain rises the scene is in total darkness. At first cue for lights a good light is thrown on the scene from behind left-hand gate; second cue light is thrown from right-hand gate; third cue light from electric bulb at top, or, if not practicable, full lights.

As the curtain is rising the sound of ascending lift is heard, and suddenly stopped; then a voice, SUSAN, *the Duchess of Wiltshire's.*

SUSAN. Oh, the lights have gone out! We've stopped. Why have we stopped?

[*The curtain, now up, shows the stage to be in darkness.*

Why have we stopped, liftman?

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

LIFTMAN. Dunno, lady.

SUSAN. Why have the lights gone out?

LIFTMAN. Dunno, lady.

SUSAN. Well! Strike a match somebody. I do so hate being in the dark. Don't be so helpless, Leonard! A match!

LEONARD. I'm sorry, Susan dear, I haven't one.

SUSAN. Has anyone else?

[*A match is now struck by* BERT, *and a tube lift is dimly visible in which are four passengers and the* LIFTMAN.

[BERT *is extreme L.,* NELLY *sits L.,* SUSAN *C.,* LEONARD *R.C.,* LIFTMAN *R.*

Oh, thank you! Thank you so much. But aren't we going on? What has happened, liftman?

LIFTMAN. Dunno, lady.

SUSAN [*to the hearers*]. These men never know! [*Graciously to* BERT] You—Mr—er—do *you* know what's wrong?

BERT. No, mum—can't say I do.

SUSAN. Of course, it's perfectly useless to ask *you,* Leonard!

LEONARD. Of course, dear. [*Crosses L.*] [*To* BERT] After you. [*Offers* BERT *cigarette.*] No? Thanks. [*Lights cigarette.*]

LIFTMAN. No smoking in the lift.

LEONARD. No, of course not. [*Blows out match.*]

SUSAN. There, it's out.

LEONARD. Don't be frightened, Susan.

[LIFTMAN *gets lamp from R.*

SUSAN. I'm not in the least frightened, I'm merely very much annoyed. Why don't we go on? You know I shall be late for dinner. Why didn't I take a taxi?

[*The* LIFTMAN *lights a lamp.*

There! [*Pause.*] He had a lamp all the while.

LEONARD [*crosses R. to* LIFTMAN]. Do these lifts ever stop?

LIFTMAN. No, sir.

SUSAN. What a question! Can't you see they stop?

[*The* LIFTMAN *turns up lamp.*

LEONARD. I can't see anything. [*Lights go half up.*]

[*The lamp now burns brightly, and shows* SUSAN, *a handsome, smart woman of thirty, very well dressed in a gown that does up at the back;* LORD PORTH, *a well-dressed, good-looking man;* BERT, *a handsome young workman with a bag of tools; and* NELLY, *a pretty, fragile-looking young girl, who is carrying a large cardboard box.*

SUSAN. That's a little better! Now, put the thing right, liftman, and let's get on.

LIFTMAN. 'Tain't nothing ter do with me, lady; I ain't stopped it, nor I can't put it right.

SUSAN. You ain't stopped it! I mean—— Well, what's the matter with the silly lift?

LEONARD. I don't think the man knows, dear.

SUSAN [*lowering her voice*]. Don't call me dear, Lord Porth. I don't even know why you're in this lift! Most undignified! And you know perfectly well that if we hadn't broken down we shouldn't have been speaking to each other at all.

LEONARD [*R.C.*]. Don't be down on me, Susan. It wasn't my fault about the beastly night-club.

SUSAN [*C., to* BERT]. Don't you think, Mr—er—that we might light that other lamp as well?

BERT [*L.C.*]. Cernly, mum.

SUSAN [*to* LEONARD]. Men never think of things for themselves! [*Watches* BERT, *who is lighting lamp down L.*] Oh, that young man is very handsome, isn't he? [*Looks again at* LEONARD, *sighs, and shakes her head; her eye falls on*

her shoe.] Do up my shoe, please, Leonard. [*Up to back R.*]

NELLY [*to* BERT]. Are we likely to be kept waiting long, do you know?

BERT [*kindly*]. I shouldn't think so, miss—not more'n a minute or two. There's nothing to be frightened over.

NELLY. Oh, I'm not frightened, in that way. It's only of being late.

BERT. Got far to go?

NELLY. Not very. But it's important. I've got to take this dress, you see. It's due there at half-past seven. Promised. And it's for some one very grand, who'll be very angry if I'm late.

BERT. Well, it ain't your fault. *You* can't 'elp it, no more'n we can.

NELLY. That won't make any difference. Besides, p'raps they won't believe there was a breakdown. They'll say I've made it up. And if the customer is reely offended, p'raps I shall be sent away.

BERT. Don't you fret, I expect we shall get on in a minute. [*Turns up the lamp; lights full up.*] There! That's a bit brighter!

SUSAN. Thank you *so* much!

[NELLY *goes up again to seat, stands reading advertisements.*

How very clever of you!

BERT. Don't name it, mum. I say, mate, there ain't much oil in this 'ere.

LIFTMAN [*stoically*]. Ain't there?

LEONARD. Really! [*He strolls over to look at it.*]

SUSAN. Oh, but it's not a question of much oil. [*Crosses to* LIFTMAN.] I mean, we're not going to *stay* here. Of course, we shall go up in a minute, shan't we, liftman?

LIFTMAN. Can't say, lady.

SUSAN. Don't you think that if you were to open the gates and call up or down, or somewhere, that it might help?

LIFTMAN. Dunno, lady.

SUSAN. Well, isn't it worth trying? I do so believe in trying!

LEONARD [*to* BERT]. Trying.

BERT. That's right, sir.

SUSAN. They may not know we've stuck; you see, they may not *know*. Now, don't you think if you called, or if we all called—even *that* gentleman [*points to* LEONARD] can shout—that they would hear us?

LIFTMAN [*utterly uninterested as ever*]. They might do.

SUSAN. Well, then, come—let's try it.

LIFTMAN. Can't be done, lady.

SUSAN. Why not?

LIFTMAN. I can't open the gates.

SUSAN. Oh, come, that's ridiculous nonsense! I've been in the tube before, you know. I go everywhere! Leonard, explain to this man——

LEONARD [*advancing*]. Look here, my man——

SUSAN [*pushes him back*]. All right, all right, all right. [*Slight pause.*] Being a duchess has never prevented me from studying human nature. I travel third class, I go in buses, even in trams. And so you see! Besides, I am a Socialist. I don't think these distinctions should exist. I consider myself and that young person quite—— [*Looking at* NELLY.]

LEONARD [*moving C.*]. Susan!

SUSAN. Yes, I do, Leonard. That young person and myself quite the same—and as to you, Leonard, and that gentleman —well, the only difference between you is that he can light a lamp and you can't. Now, in my position——

LIFTMAN [*shouts down the vault*]. Hi! Hi!

SUSAN [*stopped abruptly*]. Really——

LIFTMAN. Thought I 'eard 'em, but it warn't.

SUSAN [*to* LEONARD]. Those are their manners!

LEONARD. Yes, of course. Still, dear, I don't think it's quite the moment to make a speech.

SUSAN. That wasn't a speech, and don't call me dear. It makes me prickle when I think of what you are, Leonard. So useless, so very, very useless. You're nothing but a shop window. You have a straight nose, you have a manner, and—well—you *look* intelligent, but what use *are* you? If I had married you how ashamed I should have felt! What a failure as a husband! Worse than my first!

LEONARD. Still, dear, one doesn't marry people for their behaviour in lifts. A comparatively small part of one's life is spent in lifts.

SUSAN. Really! At this rate it seems to me a very large part! [*Looks at* BERT.] That young man is strangely decorative, isn't he? He reminds me of a picture by Millet.

LEONARD. Yes, *Bubbles*.

SUSAN. I did *not* say Millais. Mother Earth, and all that sort of thing. That's what we all need. We shall never rise by machinery.

LEONARD. Evidently.

SUSAN. That proves my point! A breakdown at once. Now I'm going to be of real use. [*To* LIFTMAN] Mr—er—Liftman, would you tell me your name? So very awkward, isn't it, not knowing each other's names? Mine's the Duchess of Wiltshire. What's yours?

[LIFTMAN *looks at her.*

Now, don't say you "dunno"!

LIFTMAN. 'Orace—'Orace 'Erbert Evans.

SUSAN. 'Orace! Thank you. [*To* BERT] And would you tell me yours?

BERT. Bert Wilson, mum.

SUSAN. Bert Wilson. Thank you. I'm the Duchess of Wiltshire—not that it matters. I dare say you may have heard of me.

BERT. Yes, mum, I have.

SUSAN. You have! How delightful! [*Crosses L.*] Do tell me what you know about me.

[BERT *smiles and looks awkward—a pause.*

LEONARD [*comes R. of her*]. I shouldn't ask him that, dear.

SUSAN. Oh? Why not?

LEONARD. One never knows *what* these people know.

SUSAN [*annoyed*]. Really, Leonard! [*Going to* BERT, *L.C.*] Now, do tell me what you've heard.

BERT. Well, mum, I've been at meetin's where you've spoke.

SUSAN. You have! Then you're one of us! I thought you were, somehow. An electric spark ran right through me! Now tell me—are you a Rationalist?

BERT. No, mum, I'm a bricklayer. Leastways, I was up to to-day. But this mornin' I've 'ad a bit of good news, I 'ave. I'm to be made foreman.

SUSAN. You won't be a bit happier, you know! It isn't our position—it isn't our money—it's Brotherhood—just the simple needs of every day met and satisfied. That's happiness.

BERT. Yes, lady; but it's 'ard to meet anythin' on what I get a week. Now, as foreman I shall get on all right, I shall—as foreman.

SUSAN. Yes, isn't that nice?

BERT. That's nice!

SUSAN. Are you married?

BERT. No, mum. [SUSAN *giggles self-consciously;* BERT *looks pointedly at* NELLY.] That's one of the things I 'ope to be able to afford, now I'm foreman.

SUSAN [*follows his glance*]. Then don't marry beneath you. Such a mistake. Look high for a mate. We are all equal, man and woman. Isn't it so? By the way, have you read my little pamphlet on the marriage question? [*Shows him a leaflet.*]

[*They ignore* LEONARD, *who moves up to mirror.* NELLY *comes R., and goes to* LIFTMAN.

NELLY [*timidly*]. Don't you think if you opened the gates and called down we might get help?

LIFTMAN [*laconic as ever*]. Can't open the gates.

NELLY. Oh, I see. [*To* LEONARD, *at back*] Excuse me, would you mind telling me the time?

LEONARD. Certainly. It's half-past seven.

NELLY. Oh, dear. We've been here ten minutes.

LEONARD. Have we? Can't count. Never could. Are you in a hurry?

NELLY. Yes. I shall be very late with this dress. It's to be worn to-night at a big party, and the lady is very particular. She'll be so annoyed if the dress isn't there in time.

LEONARD. Don't worry. I don't suppose the party begins until ten, at the earliest.

NELLY. No, but they have their dinner at half-past eight, and she wanted to dress first. I've been by this tube every day since I've been with Madame, and this is the first time it's ever broken down.

LEONARD. Well, there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the—lift. Will you take a taxi when we get out? [*Puts his hand in his pocket.*]

NELLY. Oh, no, thank you. I shouldn't like to do that.

LEONARD. Why not? They always say I've more money than brains.

NELLY. But that's very unkind. And I'm sure it's not

true. Because rich people are always clever—they learn to be clever at school and at the Oxford.

LEONARD. So you think we're not so bad after all—the idle rich?

NELLY. Oh, no. If I was rich I wouldn't work. Not making buttonholes, I wouldn't. I'd 'ave such a pretty little 'ome, and I'd cook and scrub and those nice things.

LEONARD. But I don't cook and scrub and those nice things!

NELLY. Oh, no, you're different [*sitting*]. [*Leonard takes box.*] Keep it flat!

SUSAN [*noticing* LEONARD]. Leonard, come here—come here at once. This gentleman quite understands my point in Chapter Two.

LEONARD. Chapter Two? [*Going to her.*]

SUSAN. Yes. Here—[*snatching pamphlet from* BERT] the little place I was explaining this morning——

LEONARD [*embarrassed*]. Yes. I think we ought to be doing something about this lift, Susan.

SUSAN. That's just like you. When I want to move you're lumpy, when I'm interested you agitate.

LEONARD. Well, but, Susan dear——

SUSAN. Don't call me dear.

LEONARD. This young lady is in great trouble. She's got a box that must be delivered immediately.

[BERT *strolls over to* NELLY.

SUSAN. Well, really, I can't see that her box is any more important than my dinner! However, I've done all I can—you'd better talk to the liftman about it. [LEONARD *crosses to* LIFTMAN.] Now, Mr Bert——

[*Turns, to find that* BERT *has crossed over R.C. to* NELLY, *who is furtively wiping away tears. He stands looking at her.*

LEONARD [*to* LIFTMAN]. Don't you think, my man—here,

it's you I'm talking to—don't you think it would be a good idea if you were to open the gates and call for help?

LIFTMAN. Can't open the gates.

LEONARD. Why not?

LIFTMAN. They're all worked by the same current.

SUSAN. Now isn't that like men! Only a man would have invented a thing like that. Handsome creatures, but so clumsy. Leonard, Leonard, come here at once. My shoe has come undone again—do it up, please. [LEONARD *crosses L.*] I'm beginning to feel irritable.

[*He kneels and does up her shoe, later on sits by her, between her and the other couple, at whom she occasionally looks with signs of annoyance. The* LIFTMAN *folds his arms and gives himself up to thought.*

BERT [*to* NELLY]. You look a bit worried, miss. What's up? Is it that box, eh?

NELLY. Yes. It's rather unfortunate. I'm afraid the lady's on the telephone to Madame Pichon by now. She's dreadful on the 'phone, and Madame's langwidge afterwards is awful. Never knew anyone swear like that, except Father. [SUSAN *and* LEONARD *up to seat L.*

BERT. Is it a good job, where you are?

NELLY. It's not bad. I'm gettin' on—but I've a little brother than isn't strong. That's two to keep, you see.

BERT. Ain't you got no parents? [*Sits.*]

NELLY. No. Both dead. Wasn't much use alive. Father was a rare one for the drink, and Mother 'ad fits.

BERT. Fits, did she?

NELLY. Course, if she'd bin a lady it'd 'ave been nervous breakdowns. Miss Miller, that's the forewoman, says I'll get on if I can only improve away my accent.

BERT [*not understanding*]. Oh?

NELLY. I don't know exactly what she means. Mother thort me quite the lady.

BERT. Well, so do I. [*Takes box from her. They hold it together, on both knees.*]

NELLY. Do you really?

BERT. Yes. But then I ain't a judge, p'raps. I'm only a rough workin' man. Got a bit of learnin' tho', and to-day I 'appen to have bin made foreman.

NELLY. Have you? That's good, isn't it?

BERT. Well, it's rather a nice sort of job. There was a lot of others, you see, that might 'ave 'ad it—and—well, of course, it means a bit of money.

NELLY. That's grand, isn't it? You'll be gettin' on.

BERT. I shall 'ave to think of settling down and all that, I expect. A fellow gets fed up, livin' in one room and dealin' wiv landladies. Mine's a fair knock-out. Do anyone down, she would. Never as much as made me a cup o' tea since I bin in the place, and as for bacon—Lor' lumme, I ain't never seen nothin' but the rind. Have you got far to go when you get out?

NELLY. No, it's hardly ten minutes, but it's the time, you see. [*Susan rises.*] There's some ladies that wouldn't say anything, but this one's so very 'ard to please—that she is. [SUSAN *goes L., rattles gate.*

BERT. Do you have the doin' of 'em up?

NELLY. What? The ladies?

BERT. Yes. It beats me [*nudging* LEONARD] 'ow they gits into their clothes. [LEONARD *coughs.*]

NELLY. Oh, no, I haven't got on as much as that! I'm only at making buttonholes. But if I can get a good accent I *might* be put up to hold the pin-box.

BERT. 'Old the pin-box?

NELLY. Yes, you know, at a fitting. But I shall never get put up now, never. [LEONARD *lights cigarette-lighter.*

SUSAN. There—you have a light, and just now when I asked you for a match you said you hadn't one.

LEONARD. I haven't, I never carry them. [*Lights cigarette.*]

LIFTMAN. No smoking in the lift.

LEONARD. Of course not. [*Puts out light.*]

BERT. Funny we should have met like this!

NELLY. Yes, it is, isn't it?

BERT. You know, I've often seen you in this 'ere tube, miss.

NELLY. And I've seen you, too.

BERT. 'Ave you? That's funny, ain't it? P'raps I could carry the box round for you when we get out?

NELLY. Oh, thanks, but I think I'll have to take a cab. Oh, what shall I do?

BERT. There, now, don't you worry. I don't suppose anyone'd be angry with you—not for long! I know I couldn't. I'll just see if I can do something about this 'ere, shall I?

NELLY. Oh, you're awfully kind.

[*He puts box carefully on seat.*

BERT. That's all right. [*Crossing to* LIFTMAN] I say, mate. I'm gettin' a bit fed up with this 'ere. Wot d'yer say if we open the gates and see what's goin' on? Eh? Eh?

LIFTMAN. Carn't open the gates.

BERT. Carn't be blowed! Why not?

LIFTMAN. Cos they're worked by electricity.

BERT. I think I can do it.

LIFTMAN. You can't open this 'ere gate.

BERT. For why?

LIFTMAN. It's again' the regilations.

BERT. Oh! Well, I'll open this 'ere one, then.

LIFTMAN. What for?

SUSAN. So like them. No imagination.

BERT. Might be able to find out what's goin' on upstairs.

LIFTMAN. 'Ow?

BERT. Climb up or climb down, silly!

SUSAN. Oh, what a brilliant suggestion! Leonard, Leonard.

LEONARD. Yes, dear. [BERT *works at gate, L.*

SUSAN. This gentleman has at last solved the difficulty. You shall climb up while he climbs down.

LEONARD. I climb up?

SUSAN. Well, then, climb down, don't be so fussy. [BERT *rattles gate.*] He's actually going to open the gate—how exceedingly clever! Now, Leonard, be quick—I'll hold your hat. [*Takes his hat off.*]

LEONARD. The question is, who'll hold my head?

SUSAN. What d'you mean?

LEONARD. I'm not a bally acrobat, Susan. Of course, I'd die to save you, but I never have climbed up——

SUSAN. Down—down——

LEONARD. Up *or* down anything, much less a stone shaft with nothing to hold on to.

SUSAN [*to* BERT, *hitting his back with* LEONARD's *hat*]. Can it be done? Is it possible?

BERT. Oh, yes, mum, it's all right. I can get down.

[LEONARD *takes hat from* SUSAN.

NELLY [*crossing to* BERT]. You're not going down there?

BERT. That's all right, miss. I'm used to climbing.

NELLY [*L.*]. But you mustn't do it. It's dreadful—look at the distance! And all dark! It's risking your life for nothing!

SUSAN [*crosses R.C.*]. We can't stay here all night, my good girl.

NELLY. What's it matter?

SUSAN. It may not matter to you, but *we* have appointments. It must be nearly eight o'clock. I dine at half-

past and I have to change. It's absurd to say it doesn't matter.

NELLY. But—the danger——

BERT. There ain't no danger, miss.

SUSAN. There! You hear! He says there's no danger. We can't possibly stay here for ever. If you really think it's very, very dangerous, and you don't want this young man to go—well—send the liftman.

LIFTMAN. Can't be done, lady.

SUSAN. Why not?

LIFTMAN. It's again' the regilations for me to leave this 'ere lift.

SUSAN. Well, personally, I don't care *who* goes—but some one must. I mean, it's childish, isn't it, for us all to stick here while dinners are positively frizzling?

NELLY. Why don't you go, then?

SUSAN. I?

NELLY [*pointing at* LEONARD, *who has fallen asleep, his mouth open*]. Well, send your young man.

SUSAN. That's not my young man.

NELLY. It's all to please your vanity, that's what it is. [*Shaking* LEONARD] Are you goin' to let her do it?

LEONARD. This lady does what she pleases with all of us.

SUSAN. Very nicely put, Leonard. This young person is a little over-excited.

NELLY [*crosses R.*]. It's selfish—it's cruel. I hate ladies. I never want to be a lady as long as I live—never! [*Crosses L.*]

BERT [*to* LIFTMAN]. There, that'll do. Hold the lamp, mate, will you? [LIFTMAN *crosses stage very slowly.*

SUSAN. Hold the lamp, Leonard. Do be of use.

[BERT *prepares to descend.*

NELLY. Oh, no!

BERT. It's all right, miss, give you my word. 'Ere, my lad, you'll 'urt yer 'eart if you rush about like that. [*Descends.*]

SUSAN. That young man is very handsome—and so agile. What a pity it is, Leonard, that you can do nothing! Did they teach you nothing at school?

LEONARD. No, dear, one doesn't go to school to learn things. [*A loud, hollow echo of voices is heard.*

SUSAN. What is that terrible noise?

NELLY. He's fallen!

LIFTMAN. No, 'e ain't. [*Noise repeated.*

SUSAN. There it is again. What is it, Leonard? What is it?

LEONARD [*R.C.*]. It sounds like a trombone.

SUSAN [*C.*]. Absurd!

LEONARD. I didn't say it *was* a trombone.

LIFTMAN. He's a-comin' up.

NELLY [*crosses R.*]. Oh, I'm so glad!

SUSAN. Here he is! Well, well! [BERT *appears.*

LEONARD. What's happened?

BERT. Far as I can 'ear with the echo, there's been a breakdown all along the line—and they want you to go down.

LIFTMAN. Me?

BERT. Yus. It's easy goin'.

LIFTMAN. But I never done such a thing. It ain't part of my job to go down shafts of lifts.

BERT. Well, they want yer—then when you're down they're going to lower us. [*Goes up.*]

LIFTMAN. Oh, take it off the 'ook—lower by the pulleys.

BERT. That's it.

SUSAN. Take it off the 'ook?

LEONARD. 'Ook?

SUSAN. Lower it by the pulleys?

LEONARD. Pulleys?

SUSAN. It sounds extremely dangerous.

LIFTMAN. *That's* all right enough, mum. [*Crosses to* SUSAN.] It's me a-goin' down this 'ere shaft that I don't like. I'm a family man, I am, with a trouble-and-strife and five God-forbids—— [*Voice off: "Hurry up there."*

SUSAN. Oh, that very unpleasant noise! Do go and stop it!

LIFTMAN. It's all very well for you, lady——

[*Hollow voice heard again: "Can't you hear what I'm telling you?"*

All right, I'm comin'. Give us a 'and, mate. Riskin' my life! Worth somethin', *my* life is. [*Looks viciously at* SUSAN *as he disappears.*]

SUSAN [*to* LEONARD, *after pause*]. After all, it's better *he* should go. He's exceedingly plain, and Bert is really wonderful. And so clever! I must get to know him better. Leonard, hold the lantern for that gentleman.

[LEONARD *takes the lantern from* BERT.

BERT. Thank you, sir.

SUSAN. You do believe in Brotherhood, don't you, Mr Wilson?

BERT [*backing away*]. I think I'll get the other lamp, mum. [*Crosses R.*]

SUSAN [*stiffly*]. Yes, of course, do.

LEONARD. Oh, I say, what's good for oil? [*To* SUSAN, *who comes to him annoyed, and rubs his glove.*]

NELLY [*comes down to* BERT, *who is near R. gate*]. Thank you!

BERT. Thank *you*, miss, for taking 'eed of me.

NELLY. Why did you go?

BERT. You was in a 'urry, wasn't you?

NELLY. You shouldn't have gone because of that. I'd never have forgiven myself if——

BERT. Well, I ain't dead, you see—nor I ain't goin' to be. D'yer ever get off Saturday afternoon at your shop?

NELLY. Oh, yes.

BERT. I s'pose you wouldn't like ter come to Kew?

NELLY. D'yer mean it?

BERT. Not 'arf.

NELLY. I'd like to awfully.

BERT. You'll come?

NELLY. Oh, thanks.

BERT. Right oh! Then you and me's walkin' out.

[*Voices heard again.*

LEONARD. I think he must be down by now. [*Hanging up lamp, L.*]

[*The four people now give a violent start and begin to wobble and shake.*

SUSAN. Oh! What a horrible shake! [*To* BERT] What is this shaking? I really don't like this at all!

LEONARD. I wonder what the deuce they're up to!

SUSAN. What is happening? Why are we shaking like this? I have no confidence in these men! Why can't they leave us alone until the electricity or whatever it is comes on again? It's stupid to endanger lives unnecessarily.

[*Shaking stops; sighs of relief.*

NELLY [*to* SUSAN]. You see that yourself now, do you?

SUSAN. Don't imagine for a moment that I am in the least afraid. If we *are* to be thrown down the abyss, *I* shall know how to behave——

NELLY. It's almost worth the lesson. [*Crosses R. of* BERT.]

SUSAN [*C., ignoring her*]. Oh, my dear friends, this is a wonderful example of Brotherhood. Here we are, four of us, in this little cage—four of us who half an hour ago didn't even know each other——

LEONARD [*L.*]. I knew you, Susan.

SUSAN. Don't call me dear!

LEONARD. I didn't, dear.

SUSAN. And in a few minutes we shall all perish together.

LEONARD. I sincerely hope not.

SUSAN. Hand in hand we will face this ordeal together. [*Holds out a hand to each man.* LEONARD *takes it. She pulls it away.*]

BERT. You'll excuse me, mum, but if I'm to face anything hand in hand with anyone, it's with this young lady. She's out of my class, I know—I'm only a working man—she's got good pluck, a kind heart, and a pretty face, and she could do better, but she's my choice to walk out with, and I don't care who knows it.

LEONARD. Hear, hear!

BERT. Eh?

SUSAN [*haughtily*]. I wasn't *proposing* to walk out with you. This is no moment for walking out. I wish it were!

BERT. Well, anyway, if there's going to be an accident I'll face it with 'er. [*To* NELLY] What d'you say?

NELLY. I wouldn't be a bit afraid with you.

SUSAN. Has it really come to this? Have I to die with Leonard?

LEONARD. Well, dear, you wouldn't do the other thing.

[*They all pitch suddenly forward.*

SUSAN. Ssh! Oh! What a horrible jerk!

[*They all shake and stagger.*

LEONARD. D-d-damn the thing! What are they doing!

BERT. It do seem a bit queer.

NELLY. Do you think we're going to fall?

[*A loud bang is heard and rattling of chains, and the shaking stops suddenly.*

SUSAN. He's taken it off the 'ook! Now I'm done for! I *end* here. To perish in a lift. Or *do* you think it *might* have been the liftman falling?

BERT. No, mum, not 'im.

SUSAN. No, I was afraid not—nothing ever does happen to these plain people. I wish I'd been nicer to every one!

If we *do* escape, you must all come in to dinner—yes, even you, Leonard! I must do some kind action. Oh, dear! the air seems very stifling.

LEONARD. Yes, I've noticed it. [*Crossing L., and takes down fire-extinguisher.*]

SUSAN. You've noticed it? Yet you never said anything—you never did anything—never mind, I forgive you—I forgive every one everything. [*Turning, she sees fire-extinguisher in* LEONARD's *arm.*] O-oh! [*Terrified*] What's that! Oh, it's getting very close, Bert, isn't it? [*Slipping her hand through* BERT's *arm.*]

BERT. Well, mum, it's closer than it was.

SUSAN. You know, if we get out I should like to help you so much—both of you—— [*To* BERT *and* NELLY.]

BERT. 'Scuse me, mum, but I don't want no help from nobody. [*Drawing away from her, and going up R.*]

SUSAN [*to* NELLY. *Pulls her roughly C.*]. Then I'll help *you*—I can do such a lot for you—I'm on so many committees, you know, and I could bring your name up——

NELLY. You mean it kindly, I think, but I don't need no 'elp neither.

SUSAN. Oh, ungrateful little minx!

NELLY [*crossing to* BERT]. If I'm to die 'ere, some one'll look after my little Dick—I do believe that, I do, I do—— [*Sobs;* BERT *puts his arm round her.*]

BERT. There, my girl, don't you fret.

SUSAN. Well, Bert, I must be kind to somebody. I know, I'll marry you, Leonard. [LEONARD, *who has had his back towards her, turns round sharply.*] Oh, no, I couldn't. I know, I know—I'll take your box for you, if I get out. [*Getting box from seat*] I shall be most frightfully late——

NELLY. Keep it flat!

SUSAN. But I'll take your box if it isn't too far. [*Gives box to* LEONARD.] Let me see, who is it for? [*Reads.*]

The Duchess of Wiltshire! Why, it's my dress! Oh, keep it flat! You would have been pretty late, wouldn't you, if this hadn't happened?

NELLY. No, I shouldn't. If this hadn't happened I should have been in heaps of time.

SUSAN. You've no business to run it so close.

NELLY. Well, you run it pretty close yourself, don't you?

SUSAN. Oh, now I'm going to faint!

LEONARD. Good Lord, Susan!

SUSAN. It's the dark, you know—I never could bear the dark!

NELLY. You can't faint here.

SUSAN. Oh, yes, I can. I can faint anywhere.

NELLY. No, you simply can't! There's no smelling salts and no water, so sit up!

SUSAN. Dear child! You're so practical! If I get out I'll adopt you, and the thing you call Dick. And I'll adopt you too, Bert—I'll have you all to live with me! I'll do anything—anything—— [*The light comes on full.*] [*Bright lights.*] Ah, the light—the light——

[*Voice heard: "You'll all be up in a minute."*

What did he say?

BERT. 'E says we'll all be up in a minute.

SUSAN. All up?

LEONARD. No, dear, *be* up, be saved.

SUSAN. Saved! Then we're not going to be killed! Oh, what a mercy!

LEONARD. I must say I was in a bit of a funk, Susan dear.

SUSAN. Don't call me dear! How fortunate it's all turned out so well, isn't it? Most fortunate. Where are the bags and parasols and things I had with me—oh, there they are! Gather them all up, Leonard. [*He gives her her handbag and parasol.*] You shall come home with me, Leonard—as far as my door. I'm still feeling very shaky,

you know—oh, very, very shaky! Let's get out. [*Suddenly remembers* BERT *and* NELLY.] Good evening. Now, you'll bring my dress around as quickly as possible. Don't delay. I shall make no complaint this time.

[LIFTMAN *climbs in.*

Ah! Here's Horace! Well, Horace, the danger is really over, I suppose?

LIFTMAN. Danger, mum? You ain't been in no more danger than a barrel of bananas.

SUSAN. Bananas! Oh, how nasty!

LIFTMAN. 'Ere, what's this? [*Taking extinguisher from* LEONARD.] That's again' the regilations! You ought to know better'n that. [*Hangs it up.*]

LEONARD. Sorry, Horace!

LIFTMAN [*closing gates*]. All right, go ahead. No smoking in the lift. [*Noise of lift.*

QUICK CURTAIN

PADDLY POOLS

A LITTLE FAIRY PLAY

By Miles Malleson

CHARACTERS

Grandpa	The Short Green Grass
Tony	The Wild Flowers
The Little Old Man	The Trees
His Three Friends	The Soul of All the Rabbits
The Spirits of the Sunset	

Scene I. *This side.* Scene II. *Over the other side.*
Scene III. *This side again.*

This play was first produced at the New Theatre on the afternoon of Tuesday, April 11, 1916, at a special performance by the students of the Academy of Dramatic Art, for whom it was written, with the following cast:

Grandpa	Joan Temple
Tony	Marjory Holman
The Little Old Man	Fabia Drake
His Three Friends	(1) Cicely Davies (2) Cecile Green (3) Betty Potter
The Soul of the Short Green Grass	Ivy Edwards
The Soul of the Wild Flowers	Nora Swinburne
The Soul of the Trees	Gladys Spencer
The Soul of All the Rabbits	Estelle Desmond
The Spirits of the Sunset	Stella de Valois Lucy Mackay Dolly Neave Fanny Deitz Vera Foster Ethel Hodgson Ruth Lennard Dorothy Turner Sybil Faye

Mr Miles Malleson has won distinction both as actor and playwright. He steps like a figure out of Hogarth to enrich the comedy of Mr Nigel Playfair's productions of old plays at Hammersmith, while the subjects of his own plays prove him to be a modern. "The Fanatics" gets good comedy from the case of a muddle-headed idealist, very earnest to abolish war and institute the practice of experimental marriage. "Conflict" is a political play with a strong Labour bias. "Youth" is about love in a Repertory Theatre. But besides these more serious-minded plays Mr Malleson is the author of some charming fantasies, like "The Little White Thought" and "Paddly Pools." His anti-war propaganda plays, "Black 'Ell" and "D Company," were suppressed during the War, but they have since been made available.

PADDLY POOLS[1]

Scene I. This Side

Outside an old creeper-laden cottage, in a clearing in a wood, GRANDPA *is asleep.*

The centre of the stage is strewn with toys—gollywogs, fluffy animals on wheels, etc., etc.—and in the midst of them a child, flat on his back. His head is towards the footlights; one leg, resting on the knee of the other, waves in the air. The cottage—if it is visible at all—is on the audience's left of the stage. All along the back of the scene is a bank of about four feet high. Beyond, only the sky. A signpost on the audience's left, silhouetted against the sky, and three old tree-trunks, one on the left, and the other two on the extreme right, break the sky-line.

TONY [*a little while after the curtain has risen*]. Grandpa! . . . Grandpa!! . . . GRANDPA!!!

GRANDPA. What is it, Tony?

TONY. I want to know something.

GRANDPA. What is it now?

TONY. I've been watching that cloud—ooh, for ever, ever, ever so long. *Hours*, I should think.

GRANDPA. You've been lying there exactly five minutes.

[1] Published by Messrs Hendersons, 66 Charing Cross Road, London, W.C.2 (paper covers, 1s. net). Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

TONY [*ignoring this*]. First it had a face like Daddy—now it's got like old Mrs Parkinson's pig. . . . What makes it go like that?

GRANDPA. The wind, Tony.

TONY. How does the wind make it go like that?

GRANDPA. By blowing it.

TONY. *Why* does it blow it? [GRANDPA *decides to go to sleep again.*] . . . Grandpa! . . . GRANDPA!! [GRANDPA *grunts.*] I want to know something. When the little postman without a moustache came with that brown letter tears came out of your eyes and ran all down your face —and you didn't wipe them away—you looked awfully funny. . . . Why? . . . Grandpa, why doesn't Daddy come back?

GRANDPA. Tony.

TONY. Yes, Grandpa?

GRANDPA. Come here. [*The child scrambles up and goes to him.*] Come nearer . . . nearer. My old eyes aren't what they were. There. [*He takes the child's hands in his.*] Tony, I don't want you to ask me these questions . . . not for a little while. . . . Some day you shall know the answers—but not now.

TONY. All right, Grandpa, but when I'm grown up you're going to tell me *everything* I want to know, aren't you?

GRANDPA [*the child's hand in his—very lovingly*]. When you're grown up, Tony, I may know some of the answers. And I shall be beyond the reach of your ears. . . . I think we must all find the answers for ourselves. . . . There, there, run back and play—and no more questions.

TONY [*after selecting a woolly animal to play with*]. Grandpa. . . . [*Silence.*] Grandpa.

GRANDPA. Yes?

TONY. Grandpa—may I ask one more question—only just one more—please?

GRANDPA. Well?

TONY [*suddenly getting big with mystery—creeping close to his grandfather*]. Have you ever seen the Little Old Man who lives over the other side?—all among the tree-roots, he lives—and when you look at him he disappears—*I've* seen him.

GRANDPA. What queer things you do get into your head! Now, be quiet and let me go on with my snooze. . . . [*He settles himself to sleep.*] And, Tony, you're not to go over the other side by yourself.

TONY [*returning to squat among his toys and play with them—talking to himself*]. All right. But if Daddy'd come home he'd take me. When I asked Nurse she told me he'd gone out to kill people like the pictures in my book. But I know *that's* not a true answer 'cos Daddy would never hurt anything. He used to show me how to get the rabbits out of the traps without hurting them—and how to lift the baby birds back into their nests—and the daddy bird used to sing to us all the way home to reward us. [*The child sings a song to himself. During the song the* LITTLE OLD MAN *appears from the other side, and stands outlined against the sky, on the top of the bank. The song continues until* TONY, *a large animal in his arms, gets up and suddenly sees the* LITTLE OLD MAN *on the bank. A dead pause. The animal drops from his hands. The* LITTLE OLD MAN *disappears. The child rushes across to his grandfather.*] Grandpa! [GRANDPA *is shaken violently from his sleep.*] The Little Old Man! the Little Old Man! [*He runs up the bank.*] There he is! I can see him! Grandpa! He's beckoning to me.

GRANDPA [*not really awake*]. Tony . . . Tony, come here. [*The child comes down the bank.*] You're not to go over the other side . . . stop here with your toys—and don't disturb me again.

[*He settles to sleep. The child creeps up the bank—and waves across to the other side. Then, coming*

back once more to fetch his largest woolly animal to give him courage, he reclimbs the bank.]

TONY. Little Old Man! Little Old Man! I'm coming!

[*And he disappears over the other side. An immediate black-out. Then at once :*

Scene II. Over the Other Side

The signpost and tree-trunks on the banks are reversed, as if one was looking at them from the other side.

Just under the bank, among the tree-roots, is the LITTLE OLD MAN. *His* THREE FRIENDS *are with him.*

LITTLE OLD MAN. I suppose it's somewhere about a thousand years since I've seen any of you—how are you?

FIRST FRIEND. We are very well, thank you.

LITTLE OLD MAN. I'm glad. Thank you for coming. I'll tell you at once why I have asked for your help. Some nights ago I went out for a walk and became part of the sunset ; melting into the evening winds, I wandered softly across the world. It was the hour when men return home to their women, when children run back to their mothers, when lover creeps out to meet lover. It has always been my favourite time for being out and about ; and yet everywhere I went that night—and round the earth and back I went—everywhere I found suffering, suffering, suffering. I finished as a great storm and came home. And I haven't had a happy moment since. Now it may all be my imagination—that is why I sent to you, my three friends, to ask each of you to visit the world of men. Have you anything to tell me?

FIRST FRIEND. Yesterday I visited the cities of the Western world. I became the houses in which men live. I became the fires in their grates. I leapt and sprang and threw great dancing shadows on their walls—and old people crouched

over me, silent and afraid. I stole up winding stairways and became the sheets and pillows on their beds. And on my whiteness girls sobbed themselves to sleep, whispering the names of men.

SECOND FRIEND. I spread myself, as golden sand, over the deserts of the East. Deep and far I lay, gazing up at the cloudless, breathless blue. Upon me tramped the feet of men and beasts; and red and wet their blood mixed with my yellow dust.

THIRD FRIEND. And I became the sea. Far and wide I flung myself against sheer cliffs. I was hurled high in hissing spray. Flecked with my own foam, I rolled and roared and broke against great rocks. Then I lay back, half across the world, kissed by the glinting sun, stirred into swelling rhythm by the winds. And men in great ships of steel cleaved through my greens and blues and purples; men with no eyes for my great beauty or for the flying clouds and changing skies, intent on their own work. And, as I wondered, I knew that the quiet dead were slipping down within me, down to the vast green soundless gloom beneath my waves.

LITTLE OLD MAN [*after a pause*]. So. I have lived longer than the world—and never before have I known such sorrowing. And I am helpless to make it less. [*Suddenly* TONY'S *song of Scene I is heard quite plainly from behind the bank. They listen. The* LITTLE OLD MAN *rises suddenly—he is excited.*] I have a plan. . . . I have a plan. . . . Wait.

[*He climbs on to the bank. Then* TONY'S *voice—exactly as in Scene I.*

TONY'S VOICE. Grandpa! The Little Old Man! The Little Old Man!

[*The* LITTLE OLD MAN *climbs down the bank again, and* TONY *immediately appears on the top of it. The* LITTLE OLD MAN *beckons to him.*

TONY. There he is! I can see him! Grandpa! He's beckoning to me.

GRANDPA'S VOICE [*exactly as in Scene I*]. Tony . . . Tony, come here. [TONY *disappears.*] You're not to go over the other side . . . stop here with your toys and don't disturb me again.

[TONY *appears, disappears, and reappears with his woolly animal.*

TONY. Little Old Man! Little Old Man! I'm coming!

[TONY *comes down the bank.*

LITTLE OLD MAN. How d'you do, Tony?

TONY [*shaking hands politely*]. How d'you do, Little Old Man? But I don't know how you know I'm Tony.

LITTLE OLD MAN. Oh, come, I've known you since you were born. Why, I've looked in to say good-night to you two or three times a week for years.

TONY. But I've never seen you.

LITTLE OLD MAN. You may not have recognized me, perhaps. I usually get into the ray of yellow light from the little blue lamp on the shelf above your bed, and, shedding down on to your pillow, I find a wonderful playground in your hair—and occasionally, if I've got time to spare when your grandpa puts out the lamp, I jump into the night-light on the chair—and climb on to the ceiling—and look down and watch you till you drop to sleep. You don't look as if you really believed me.

TONY. You knew about my little blue lamp—and how Grandpa puts it out and the night-light on the chair . . . and yet if you'd been on the ceiling I couldn't have missed you!

LITTLE OLD MAN. But you don't suppose that now you're looking at ME, do you? [TONY *can only stare.*] Why, bless your soul! I only live in this old body of mine for exactly the same reason as your grandpa lives in his cottage. It's

old and all tumbly down, but it's rather beautiful, and it suits me. But it's no more ME than your grandpa's cottage is your grandpa.

TONY. It's awfully puzzling.

LITTLE OLD MAN. It's not half so bad as it sounds. Tony, you're going to stay with me just a little while—and when you go back to Grandpa—you'll understand. Excuse me for a moment. [*He turns to his* THREE FRIENDS.] My plan is growing. [*To the* FIRST FRIEND] Fetch here the Soul of the Short Green Grass—tell him that for a while he is to take charge of the soul of a child. [*Exit* FIRST FRIEND.] You to the Wild Flowers, the Trees, and the Soul of All the Rabbits. Tell them the same. [*Exit* SECOND FRIEND.] You to the Spirits of the Sunset. [*Exit* THIRD FRIEND.]

TONY. Please, if it's lessons, I shall never understand. Nurse says I'm a dunce.

LITTLE OLD MAN. Listen. [TONY *puts his hands behind his back, and feet together, as if he were standing in a class-room.*] Have you ever been to the seaside?

TONY. 'Course I have.

LITTLE OLD MAN. Have you ever noticed when the sea goes out it leaves lots of little pools behind, among the rocks?

TONY. Paddly pools, yes.

LITTLE OLD MAN. The water in the paddly pools is just the same as the water in the great big sea; and the life in you and me is just the same as the life that is everywhere; the paddly pools run into the great live sea; you and I can do the same.

TONY. I'm sure I couldn't repeat that without a mistake.

[*A green person bounds on to the stage.*

LITTLE OLD MAN. Ah! here's a great friend of mine who's going to take care of you for a little while. Let me introduce you. The Soul of the Short Green Grass . . . this is Tony.

TONY [*always polite—holding out his hand*]. How d'you do?

SOUL OF THE SHORT GREEN GRASS [*with a tremendous vitality*]. This is splendid. Little human child, you don't know what a glorious time you're going to have. You will clutch tight on to the great clean earth in one long joyous embrace that never ends. You will know the joy of the sun, and the light air, and the dew, and the rain, and the vast quiet nights. You will carpet the roots of the great trees; you will peep down into the secret homes of the wild creatures—their dear eyes will look out at you in the first cool morning mists. You will feel yourself stirring wonderfully with a myriad life, moving, living, loving among your sweet green blades. [*A very beautiful little person has come on.*] Here are the Wild Flowers, the little songs among my grass.

SOUL OF THE WILD FLOWERS [*taking* TONY *by the hand*]. Your spirit shall mingle with my spirit, and I will scatter you among the fields and woods and lanes and hedges, and you shall know the joy, the joy, the joy of making the world beautiful. [*The* SOUL OF THE TREES *has entered.*

SOUL OF THE TREES. I am the Trees. Come with me, and you shall stand up—tall and strong and beautiful; gazing, gazing up—learning the never-ceasing wonder of the sky. You shall feel the loving clasp of the brown earth on your roots; and you shall stretch out your arms and twisted fingers, and, as the air wraps you round, know that there is no kiss like the kiss of the wind. You too shall feel life moving within your bark—and the dear chattering birds among your branches. You shall learn wisdom from the noises of the day, and greater wisdom from the silence of the night. [*A furry thing has bounded on to the stage.*

LITTLE OLD MAN. Here's an old friend of yours. This is the Soul of All the Rabbits.

SOUL OF ALL THE RABBITS [*whisking and bounding about in magnificently irrepressible animal spirits*]. Manchild—

Little Manchild—you're going to be one of us. Have you ever known anything so splendid? [*With delightful squeaks, and perhaps a somersault or two, he frolics close around* TONY.] You'll learn the joy of eyes and ears and a nose! The smell of the forest pools! Moonlight games in the woods! The cool, beautiful dawn air! Oh! Ho! The joy of just being alive!

TONY. What about old Farmer Parkinson's dog?

SOUL OF ALL THE RABBITS. Ho! He's a silly old fool of a dog—such a silly old fool. Our mothers taught us to 'freeze'—to be so still, the eyes of men can't see us; to keep to the shelter of our friends the thorn-bushes, so the hawks can't reach us—to run and double and dodge, so the dogs can't catch us.

TONY. Everything hunts rabbits—I should be frightened of being killed.

LITTLE OLD MAN. You won't know what "being killed" means, so you won't be frightened.

TONY. Little Old Man—perhaps you can tell me something Grandpa never will—where do the rabbits go to when they die?

LITTLE OLD MAN. Of course I can. The life that is in each—comes back to the Soul of All the Rabbits—a little bit wiser than it went out—that's how the race evolves.

TONY. What's evolves?

LITTLE OLD MAN. Well, if lots of rabbits get caught by enemies because they haven't got a particular-coloured coat in a particular kind of country—each little Rabbit Spirit returns to the Soul of All the Rabbits and tells it; and sooner or later they get the right-coloured coat. [*From without, the sound of children laughing.*] Ah—here they are! It's time we were starting.

TONY. Who are "they," and how are we going to start?

LITTLE OLD MAN. "They" are the Spirits of the Sunset—

and we are going to start my favourite way. You will fling yourself in colours across the evening sky until you watch the sun drop over the edge of the world. And then my friends here will look after you. [*The* LITTLE OLD MAN *becomes immensely serious.*] Little child of men, I want you to learn a little of the untellable joy of the great life. From the littlest flower that smiles from its mossy bed, to the greatest star that blazes in endless space, how *good* everything is! . . . I shall be waiting for you when you come back.

[*The* SPIRITS OF THE SUNSET *invade the stage. They can be of various ages and sizes, and should be draped in various sunset colours. The scene should be a great pæan of joy. The* SPIRITS OF THE SUNSET *speak:*

I'm going to fall backwards half across the sky, and roll headlong down a bank of clouds.

I shall make the winds tear me a great rift in the sky—and then I shall lie in it.

I shall stretch out thinly along the edge of some great cloud, and watch the day fade out.

We are to float about the sun—wrapping him round as he sheds off his robes of colour—making us glorious.

I will splash down to the earth, into the window-panes, and then laugh back at you.

I will climb the highest arches of the sky, and fill the dome of heaven with my joy.

I know a river flowing among deep silent woods. I will lean down and see my mirrored beauty in its pools.

And I will dive in you—and, bathed in your clear colour, stretch thin fingers pale across the East.

LITTLE OLD MAN. Up and away! Come along, come along. Come along. All of you.

SOME OF THE SPIRITS. Up and away.

[*Some of the Spirits, dancing up the bank, leap from*

it and disappear—their colours immediately begin to fill the sky.

LITTLE OLD MAN [*to some others*]. Now, then. Time enough to play when we're in the sky.

SPIRITS. Up and away.

[*They leap over the bank, apparently into the sky.*

LITTLE OLD MAN [*to some more*]. Children—children—the clouds are waiting. Come!

SPIRITS. Up and away. [*They disappear.*

LITTLE OLD MAN [*to the last of them*]. You were the last yesterday evening. The winds are waiting to sweep you up. Come, up and out over the world.

LAST OF THE SPIRITS. Up and away.

[*The* LITTLE OLD MAN *and* TONY *are alone.*

LITTLE OLD MAN. And now——

[*But suddenly* TONY *bursts into tears.*

TONY. I don't want to go with you—I'm frightened, I am. You're all doing such funny things! I don't want to *be* anything—only myself.

LITTLE OLD MAN. Tony, this isn't very brave.

TONY. Don't want to be brave—all by myself.

LITTLE OLD MAN. Tony.

TONY. Yes?

LITTLE OLD MAN. Hide your eyes.

[TONY *does. The* LITTLE OLD MAN *turns round. His beard comes off—his cloak falls from him, and he is a little girl.*

LITTLE GIRL. Hullo!

TONY. Hullo!!! . . . Where's my Little Old Man gone?

LITTLE GIRL. I'm to take care of you—so you won't be alone. [*She holds out her hand.*] Will you come with me?

TONY. Y—yes. [*They join hands, and she leads him up the bank. A black-out.*]

SCENE III. THIS SIDE AGAIN

In a moment it is light again back 'on this side.' GRANDPA *sleeps peacefully as we left him.* TONY'S *voice is heard calling.*

TONY. Grandpa! Grandpa! Grandpa!! [*He climbs over the bank—and runs to his grandfather*]. Wake up! . . . wake up! wake up!! have you been to sleep all this time?

GRANDPA. All the time! What! Good heavens! it isn't past my tea-time, is it? [*He consults his watch.*] No, of course it isn't.

TONY. You mustn't go to sleep again. Oh, Grandpa—such wonderful—wonderful—wonderful adventures I've been having—such lots and lots, I don't know where to begin to tell.

GRANDPA. What *are* you talking about?

TONY [*with a wave of his hand upwards*]. Oooh! I've been up there.

GRANDPA. Tony!

TONY. Yes. Blown into all sorts of shapes I was—and tumbled right across the sky. I've been a great big tree and a tiny, tiny, tiny, tiny little twig on the end of a branch—and a great big field and wee, soft blade of grass—and all the time the Little Girl was talking to me——

GRANDPA [*rather frightened*]. Tony — Tony — are you awake?

TONY [*unheeding—pointing out to the audience*]. That field—and the woods across, and the little silver river, and the blue hills beyond—that's all mine.

GRANDPA [*quite frightened*]. Tony!

TONY. Yes. 'Cos I love it. The Little Girl said that was the only way you can really have a thing, by loving it. And I do love it. I love everything *tremendously*. Grandpa, have you ever felt really *close* to things—ooooh—

as close—as—when I used to jump into Mummy and Daddy's bed? It's a beauty feeling! Gracious! I forgot. The Little Old Man said he'd be waiting for me. [*He rushes to the top of the bank, and stands looking over*]. He's not there. [*But the* LITTLE OLD MAN'S *voice is heard.*

LITTLE OLD MAN'S VOICE. My Three Friends!

VOICES OF THE THREE FRIENDS. We are here.

LITTLE OLD MAN'S VOICE. My plan is good. Go to the land of men; to every nation and to every home, and teach the children what I have taught this child. Only the children—the grown-ups will think it nonsense. We meet again in five hundred years. Till then, good-bye.

VOICES OF THE THREE FRIENDS. Five hundred years. Good-bye.

[*The sound of their voices dies away, till it might be the wind sighing through the woods.*

TONY [*stretching out his arms again*]. All that—all mine. The whole world might belong to every one like that . . . without any barbed wire or quarrelling. Wouldn't that be nice for every one?

GRANDPA. Tony, come here. [*Kissing him with a wise shake of his old head*] What nonsense you're talking!

CURTAIN

THE POACHER

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

By J. O. Francis

CHARACTERS

Twmas Shôn
Marged Shôn
Dicky Bach Dwl
Dafydd Hughes

The first performance of this play was given at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, during the Easter Reunion of Old Students in 1914, with the following cast:

Twmas Shôn	J. S. Davies
Marged Shôn	E. B. Davies
Dicky Bach Dwl	T. R. Evans
Dafydd Hughes	John Edwards

Produced by the Author.

Perhaps of all the victories of village drama the most surprising is the recent conquest of Wales. The Welsh are a musical people, given to Eisteddfods, but traditionally they stood in opposition to the theatre. Times change, and the Welsh with them, and the publishers of "The Poacher" have a series of some eighty Welsh plays both in Welsh and English. There is a very strong drama movement in Wales, and it is completely amateur, both in actors and in authors. Little is heard of its activities in England, but there is an Anglo-Welsh wing represented by Mr J. O. Francis, Mr Richard Hughes, and Mr A. V. Roberts.

Mr Francis is widely known as the author of "Change, a Glamorgan Play in Four Acts," which has been acted in London and New York. His one-act plays—*e.g.*, "The Poacher," "The Bakehouse"—are delightful little comedies of village life.

Welsh Expressions in the Play

'merchi = "my daughter." *'nhad* = "my father." *fach, bach* = "little" (in the endearing sense). *darro*, an expletive. *Darro dy ben di* = "Curses on your head." *Taw sôn* = "Hold your peace."

THE POACHER[1]

SCENE: *Living-room of a cottage on a Welsh countryside. In right wall (from stage to audience), a fireplace with fire lit, fire-irons, kettle, bellows, candle on mantelpiece; back corner of right wall, door to kitchen. Middle of back wall, window with curtains drawn back; before window, small table with flower-pots; left corner of back wall, door to the lane. In left wall down-stage, passage, in which is stairway; middle of wall, a dresser; lamp alight, tray, and basket of stockings on dresser. Pictures and ornaments appropriate to the setting.*

Middle of room, round table set for supper. Right of table, armchair; ordinary chair left of table; right of window, another; between dresser and passage another; under this a pair of girl's boots. Hat-pegs near door with TWMAS SHÔN'S *hat.*

Through the window can be seen a rough country lane. The view without is lit by brilliant moonlight.

TIME: *An evening in spring.*

When the curtain rises MARGED *is standing near stairs. She is a capable woman in middle life, simply dressed, energetic, and homely.* TWMAS SHÔN, *seated in armchair at table, is finishing his supper. He is a big, strong man, dressed in workman's clothes.*

MARGED. Good night, Mary Jane. Sleep well.

[1] Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to the publishers, Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

TWMAS. Good night, 'merchi.

MARY JANE [*off stage on left*]. Good night, mam; good night, 'nhad.

MARGED [*to* TWMAS]. Finished?

TWMAS. Yes.

[*He rises, pushes armchair towards fire, goes to window, and looks out.* MARGED *takes tray from dresser, and gathers things together on table.*

TWMAS. I wonder who was down there last night.

MARGED. Where?

TWMAS. Down the Big Field.

MARGED. Oh! Morris the shoemaker, perhaps, or Jenkins the tailor.

TWMAS. No. All the regular poachers were down in the village at the living pictures that came there last night. [*He comes down to fireplace and lights his pipe.*]

MARGED. Oh, yes! I forgot. Some stranger, perhaps.

TWMAS. I dare say. They come from a good way to try for Old Soldier there.

MARGED. Well, it's a surprise to me, I must say—all the men in the village can't catch one silly old rabbit.

[*She takes tablecloth and shakes it into the lane. Coming back, she gives one end to* TWMAS, *who helps her to fold it.*

TWMAS. I could catch him to-night, my gel, if I hadn't reformed my ways and joined the chapel.

MARGED. I don't see, Twmas, why joining the chapel should stop you bringing home a few rabbits now and then.

TWMAS. Me go on poaching, Marged, after all the trouble they had to convert me?

MARGED. Well, you know, Twmas, scrape how I will, I can hardly make both ends meet, and when there's only eighteen and sixpence a week coming in a few rabbits make all the difference.

TWMAS. No, Marged. I want to keep my good character. I'm proud of my good character. I've only had it two months.

MARGED. Character or no character, I suppose you'll want your dinner to-morrow?

TWMAS. Well, I was thinking of it, Marged, it's true—a nice little bit of beef steak since you're asking.

MARGED. Yes, but where the money's to come from, I don't know.

TWMAS. You must have faith, Marged fach, faith! [*Crossing towards foot of stairs*] I'd better tell Mary Jane before she goes to sleep. Mary Jane!

MARY JANE. Yes?

TWMAS. I want you to go down to Davies the butcher before going to school in the morning.

MARY JANE. What for?

TWMAS. Half a pound of beef steak, my gel. Tell him to put it down. [*He goes up to window and looks out.*]

MARGED. If you were a worry to me before, Twmas, you're ten times worse now you're reformed.

TWMAS [*unheeding*]. I wonder who'll get him after all! [*With a sigh, he goes towards armchair. In the distance, without, a man's voice is heard singing an old Welsh song.* TWMAS *starts a little.*] There's Dicky Bach Dwl down there on the road. [*The singing gradually comes nearer.*]

MARGED. Aay, poor Dicky! [*Looking about her*] Let me see. There's Mary Jane's boots to clean. [*She takes up boots under chair.*]

TWMAS. No, I'll clean them. [*He takes boots and puts them near fireplace.*]

MARGED. Well, I'll chop the sticks, then.

TWMAS. No. I'll chop the sticks, Marged.

MARGED. It's no good, Twmas, you'll never keep it up.

TWMAS. " Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands

to do." That's what Dafydd Hughes the Shop said. [*Pause.*] Drat his old singing!

MARGED. He's coming up the lane. [*She lights candle.*]

TWMAS [*restlessly*]. He's a terrible temptation to a man is Dicky Bach Dwl. It's true he's not quite right in the head—poor Dicky! Ah! but we've had some grand sport together—grand sport! I'm going to chop the sticks, Marged. I don't want to see Dicky to-night.

[*Taking candle, he goes into back kitchen, followed by* MARGED, *who returns with the washing-up bowl, towel, blacking-brushes, etc. She puts blacking-brushes near boots by fire; puts bowl on table. Meanwhile the singing has grown louder and louder. It stops suddenly, giving place to a long, low whistle.* MARGED *opens the door.*

MARGED. Come in, Dicky Bach Dwl. Why do you always whistle like that? [*She goes back to table and prepares to wash up.*]

[DICKY BACH DWL *passes the window and appears in the doorway. He is a young man in ragged clothes. He is weak of wit, but there is nothing unpleasant about him. In the keenness of his senses and the quickness of his movements when excited there is a suggestion of the animal. He frequently falls into vacancy, and sometimes, in his effort to follow what others are saying, there are signs of mental strain.*

DICKY. Is your husband in, Marged Shôn? [*Right of doorway a dog is heard whining.*] Ah! Oh! Fan! Fan! [*He bends as if patting the dog.*]

MARGED. She's getting very savage to strangers now, but she doesn't even bark at you.

DICKY. The dogs are never against me, Marged Shôn; it's only men and women. [*The dog howls.*]

MARGED. Come in, Dicky Bach, or you'll drive her wild.

DICKY [*entering and closing door*]. It's the smell of my clothes, Marged Shôn. It makes her think of the grand times we've had together.

MARGED [*sighing*]. Yes. There was no need to think twice of the dinner then.

DICKY. Many a night, Marged Shôn. Ah, many a night, out on the hills together—Fan, the ferret, your husband, and me!

MARGED. It's all over on you now, boy bach, I'm afraid —all over!

DICKY [*slyly*]. We'll see, Marged Shôn. There's the spring in the air, and there's the buds all breaking in the hedges. Wait you. We'll see!

MARGED. You've been over the hills for a couple of days, I hear.

DICKY. Yes. All the way to Eglwys Fawr. [*He looks hungrily at the loaf on the table.*]

MARGED. Sit down, and have something to eat, Dicky Bach.

DICKY. No, thank you, Marged Shôn.

MARGED [*forcing him into chair left of table*]. Sit you down, 'machgeni. [*Cutting bread and butter*] You've had something to eat to-day, I hope?

DICKY. Oh, yes! I mended some buckets in Eglwys Fawr, and I bought a black pudding. [*Thoughtfully*] If I was a member of Parliament I think I'd be eating black pudding all day long.

MARGED. Yes. They've got a lot of privileges. So you missed the living pictures last night?

DICKY. Yes. What was it like?

MARGED. I don't know. Very grand, so I hear. Twm Tinker will tell you all about it.

DICKY. No. He was over the hills, I think.

MARGED. Poor Twm! They say he'll never get over having to sell the pig like that, but when it was a case of thirty shillings and costs or fourteen days there was nothing else to do. Still, I think Dafydd Hughes could have kept his mouth shut.

DICKY. Twm will never rest till he's even with him. He's only waiting his chance. Oh! I was forgetting. Where's Twmas Shôn?

MARGED. D'you want him particular, then, Dicky?

DICKY. Yes. It's the ferret. It's bad, I think.

MARGED. Bad? You must tell him, then, Dicky. He was always so proud of the ferret.

[*She opens kitchen door.* TWMAS *is heard chopping sticks.* MARGED *says,* "*Twmas,*" *and* TWMAS, *disturbed, hits his hand and swears loudly. He enters, carrying bundle of sticks and candle, and sucking at the injured finger.*

MARGED. Did you hurt your hand, Twmas bach?

[*Muttering under his breath,* TWMAS *puts sticks on hob.*

TWMAS [*cooling down*]. Excuse me swearing, Marged.

MARGED. Swear you, if it's any consolation.

TWMAS [*turning, candle in hand*]. Hullo, Dicky Bach! Come back, then?

DICKY. Yes, Twmas Shôn. [*His attitude to* TWMAS SHÔN *is that of hero-worship without reserve.*]

TWMAS. Go on you, Dicky. [DICKY *goes on eating.*

MARGED. It's about the ferret Dicky has come, Twmas.

TWMAS [*concerned*]. The ferret?

[*He gives candle to* MARGED. *She blows it out and puts it on the mantelpiece. Taking bellows, she blows the fire, which brightens into a good blaze.*

DICKY. He doesn't seem quite up to the mark; that's all.

TWMAS. Haven't you been looking after him, then, Dicky?

DICKY. Yes! Oh, yes! Just as you told me, Twmas Shôn. Will you come down and see him?

[TWMAS *goes towards his hat, but stops.*

TWMAS. No. Bring him up before going to bed. [*With a gesture towards window*] D'you take him out now and then, Dicky?

DICKY. Me? No, not I! What pleasure would it be to me and you not there, Twmas Shôn?

TWMAS. It isn't for me to encourage you, Dicky; but there's plenty of others to work with.

DICKY. No, Twmas Shôn, there's no others. You know there's no others.

TWMAS. There's Jenkins the tailor for one.

DICKY [*scornfully*]. He shoots at a rabbit sitting. No, never!

MARGED. Well, there's Morris the shoemaker.

DICKY. Him? D'you know the truth about Morris? It was he put the lime in the river two years ago.

TWMAS. What?

DICKY. Yes. Twm Tinker told me; and what's more, Twmas Shôn, he's been talking of setting a trap for Old Soldier down there.

TWMAS. A trap? Isn't it understood by us all he's only to be tried for with ferret and net? I tell you this now, Dicky—if Morris sets a trap for Old Soldier, converted or not, I'll break his neck. He's given us good sport has that rabbit, and he's got to have fair play.

MARGED [*going to table*]. You're sure it wasn't Morris was down there last night, Twmas? [*She takes crockery to dresser, putting things in place.*]

TWMAS. No. He was at the show for certain. Dicky?

DICKY. Well?

TWMAS. D'you know of some one about here, a bit taller than Morris, who wears a big cap with flaps—you know?

DICKY. No, nobody.

TWMAS. He was down there last night after Old Soldier. I slipped out to see who he was; but he went off at once, and a glimpse of that cap was all I got.

DICKY [*slyly*]. D'you remember the last time we tried for him, Twmas Shôn?

TWMAS [*rather sharply*]. Never you mind about that now, Dicky.

DICKY. He slipped us once more, you remember? And we had to dig for the ferret. And there was Fan, with her ears up straight and her eyes like fire.

TWMAS. Yes. He slipped us, it's true; but if I'd known then what I know to-day, we'd have had him—like that [*closing his hands impressively*]. But that's all over now, so it's no use talking. [*He sits down in armchair and slips his hand into one of the boots, preparing to clean.*]

DICKY [*seductively*]. He's down there still, Twmas Shôn. [*He goes to window and looks out.*]

MARGED. Only one amongst others.

TWMAS. If I'm to be a respectable man, Marged, I've got to resist the temptation of the flesh; and for me, as you know, the temptation of the flesh is chiefly rabbits.

MARGED [*going towards kitchen*]. Well, I mustn't complain. I prayed you'd reform, Twmas; but, indeed, I never thought I'd be taken so serious. [*She goes out sighing.*]

TWMAS. Aay, poor old Adam! It's only a man like me can understand!

DICKY. It's not really all over, Twmas Shôn? You're coming back to us sooner or later?

TWMAS [*playing idly with boot-brush*]. No. It's all over now, Dicky Bach. I'm a respectable man at last.

DICKY. But I'm not respectable, Twmas Shôn—nor Fan, nor the ferret.

TWMAS. No. I don't suppose they could make a respectable man of you, Dicky Bach—not even Dafydd Hughes the Shop.

DICKY. I don't want to be. I don't want to at all. Do you like it so much, then?

TWMAS [*temporizing*]. Well, you see, Dicky, it's one of those things you've got to get used to.

DICKY [*perplexed*]. Oh!

TWMAS. Yes. A man can get used to anything—sooner or later.

DICKY [*pityingly*]. It will be very dull for you on times —with such things in the world as there are, Twmas Shôn.

TWMAS. Oh, it won't be so bad as all that, I dare say!

DICKY. Grand things there are in the world, Twmas Shôn. There's the pheasants going up with a *whir-r-r!* —like that. And the rabbits—*Tap! Tap!*—and off to go with their little white tails in the air. And there's the salmon as well, coming up the river fat from the sea——

TWMAS [*beginning to polish with furious zeal*]. Darro dy ben di, boy! You're worse than the ten plagues of Egypt.

DICKY. D'you remember that night, Twmas Shôn, when we were after the salmon, and I was caught by the keepers? [*He begins to laugh at the recollection.*]

TWMAS [*laughing in spite of himself*]. Yes. It was lucky for you I was with you then.

DICKY. Oh! It was fine fun going after the salmon, eh, Twmas Shôn? Can't you think of it now? The river all dark—me with the torch, and you with the spear—waiting—waiting—and no sound to be heard at all, only

the river going over the stones, and the wind in the trees above us.

TWMAS [*jumping to his feet*]. Taw sôn, Dicky. To think the devil could come to a man in the shape of Dicky Bach Dwl!

DICKY. And then, sometimes, we'd be after a hare, you at one gate and me at the other, and Fan in the field to raise her. And then I'd come to you, or you'd come to me, and we'd whistle.

[*He whistles their signal, and, repeating it, breaks off suddenly. The dog is heard whining piteously without.*

TWMAS [*moved*]. Oh—darro!

DICKY [*towards door*]. I know, Fan. I know. I'm telling him.

TWMAS. It's no use, Dicky. Grand times they were; but I've given it up.

DICKY. D'you know what they're saying in the village, Twmas Shôn? They say you've lost heart. They say you're afraid of the keepers.

TWMAS. What? Afraid? Me?

DICKY. Yes, you! Morris is saying it; Jenkins is saying it; Evans the Bread is saying it. [*With passionate loyalty*] And I've told them it's all damned lies, Twmas Shôn.

TWMAS [*carried away*]. That's right. Tell them it's all damned lies, Dicky. Afraid indeed!

DICKY. You're not afraid of anything, are you, Twmas Shôn? You were always the only man who wasn't afraid.

TWMAS. I'd match my wits against all the keepers in the place. I've done it—hundreds of times, and I've always won. I've turned over a new leaf; that's all. They can ask Dafydd Hughes the Shop.

DICKY. I hate Dafydd Hughes the Shop!

TWMAS. Now, Dicky Bach! Come, come! He's a very good man is Dafydd Hughes, and he's the oldest deacon in Carmel.

DICKY. He's taken you from us, Twmas Shôn—from Fan and the ferret and me. It isn't the same in the world at all. Oh, we were so happy together, us four, till you listened to Dafydd Hughes!

TWMAS. He's a highly respectable man, I tell you; and he's done me a lot of good.

DICKY [*going towards him, searching his face*]. You're not afraid of Morris or Jenkins, and you're not afraid of the keepers, I know. But tell me the truth, Twmas Shôn, are you afraid of old Dafydd Hughes the Shop?

TWMAS [*faltering*]. Don't ask such silly questions, boy.

DICKY. Yes. You're afraid, Twmas Shôn. You're afraid, too—even you. He's got all the village now, except me, and I'm only Dicky Bach Dwl. But he shan't have me. No, never! There's only me now, but I'll sing my song as I go down the road, and no man's black look shall stop me.

TWMAS. Dicky?

DICKY. Well?

TWMAS. Don't you ever want to be a respectable man? Doesn't it come over you sometimes—not often—but sometimes?

DICKY. No.

TWMAS. Don't you ever think it's a good thing to be a big man in the chapel?

DICKY. No.

TWMAS. Nor to be elected, some day, perhaps, on the Rural District Council?

DICKY. No.

TWMAS. Well, what do you think of, Dicky?

DICKY [*vacantly*]. Think—Twmas Shôn? I—I don't

know. I've been thinking to-day it's lovely black puddings they make in Eglwys Fawr. Is that what you mean, Twmas Shôn?

TWMAS. No. Don't you ever think what an awful sinner you've been in your time?

DICKY. No.

TWMAS. Don't you ever worry your head about the immortal soul they say you've got inside you?

DICKY. No.

TWMAS [*thoughtfully*]. H'm! Oh! I wonder which is the dull one after all—you or me?

DICKY. There's somebody coming. [*His attitude suddenly becomes rigid.*]

TWMAS. Is there?

DICKY. Can't you hear?

TWMAS. No, nothing. You've got eyes like a cat and ears like a dog.

DICKY [*with aversion*]. It's Dafydd Hughes the Shop!

[*The dog begins to bark.* DICKY *says, "Hiss, Fan, hiss!" under his breath.* TWMAS *goes to kitchen door.*

TWMAS. Marged, quick! Here's Dafydd Hughes coming.

MARGED [*entering*]. Bother Dafydd Hughes! [*Dusting armchair with her apron*] Dicky, don't go before I give you a bit for breakfast.

[TWMAS *opens the door and quiets dog.* DAFYDD HUGHES *comes past the window.*

TWMAS [*with great deference*]. How are you to-night, Mr Hughes?

[*Enter* DAFYDD HUGHES THE SHOP, *a man of about sixty-five years of age. His clothes suggest the mixture of the shopkeeper and the farmer. His attitude to* TWMAS SHÔN *is one of friendly concern, slightly touched with condescension.*

HUGHES [*shaking hands with* TWMAS]. I hope you are well, Twmas Shôn.

TWMAS. Very well, thank you, Mr Hughes.

HUGHES [*shaking hands with* MARGED]. And you too, Marged Shôn.

MARGED. Oh, middling indeed!

HUGHES [*seeing* DICKY]. H'm!

TWMAS. Sit you down, Mr Hughes.

MARGED. Nice night for a little walk, Mr Hughes.

HUGHES [*seating himself in armchair*]. Yes. But the wind is going round again, I'm afraid. I have come up to see you this evening, Twmas Shôn, after consultation with my fellow-deacons.

TWMAS [*impressed*]. Oh!

HUGHES. Yes.

MARGED. Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll just finish what I was doing. [*She goes into kitchen.*]

HUGHES. And I may say, Twmas Shôn, that you were the subject of our discussion.

TWMAS. Me?

HUGHES [*looking significantly towards* DICKY]. Yes, but I——

TWMAS. Oh! Dicky is up here about the ferret, Mr Hughes.

HUGHES [*surprised*]. The ferret?

TWMAS [*anxiously*]. It's not what you're thinking, Mr Hughes, no, indeed! The ferret isn't up to the mark. Dicky was only just asking——

HUGHES. I understand. I am sorry to hear—er, Richard, that you are keeping very low company about here now. There's that fellow, Twm Tinker, for instance.

TWMAS. Well, you see, Twm is teaching him the trade, and, after all, it's very kind of him. There aren't so many who're kind to Dicky Bach Dwl.

HUGHES. He's one of those it's not easy to be kind to, Twmas Shôn. I tried to——

DICKY [*angrily*]. You tried to put me down there, Dafydd Hughes.

TWMAS. Now, Dicky! Mr Hughes meant it all for the best.

HUGHES. You'd have been much better off in the workhouse. There's regular food and regular hours——

DICKY. And a big wall all around, Dafydd Hughes.

TWMAS [*half aside*]. *Mister* Hughes, Dicky Bach.

DICKY. No, Twmas Shôn, I'm not afraid.

HUGHES. It will pay you, my boy, to show a little more respect where respect is due.

DICKY. If I sleep in the hedge and wash in the stream, what's that to you or anyone else, Dafydd Hughes?

HUGHES [*meaningly*]. There's more than one has complained of losing their chickens.

DICKY. God gives the chickens to some, and to those who've got none He gives hands, Dafydd Hughes.

TWMAS. Shut up, Dicky!

HUGHES. What can you expect, Twmas Shôn? You know what his company is—the lowest of the low. Yes, tramps, and tinkers, and gipsies——

DICKY. Yes, tramps, and tinkers, and gipsies, and all poor people about the roads. They don't drive me away, Dafydd Hughes, and there's no hard words from them. We talk together like friends as we go along——

TWMAS. Yes, Dicky Bach, and very nice it is, too, we know; but there's——

HUGHES. Strange sort of pleasure for any decent man, I must say. I think, Twmas Shôn, if you're to come to any good, it's about time you finished with fellows of this kind.

DICKY [*blazing out*]. Why don't you let him alone,

Dafydd Hughes? He belongs to us—to Fan and the ferret and me. You'd got all the village before. Wasn't that enough for you, Dafydd Hughes? I've only stolen chickens and a few turnips now and then. But what about you? You've stolen a man.

TWMAS. Dicky, Dicky!

DICKY [*pleadingly*]. Come back to us, Twmas Shôn!

TWMAS [*kindly*]. You don't understand these things, Dicky Bach. Now you'd better run down and see about the ferret.

DICKY. Oh, yes, the ferret! I was forgetting.

[*He turns to go. Enter* MARGED *with a packet of food.*

MARGED. Going, Dicky?

DICKY. Yes, but I'm coming back with the ferret.

MARGED. There's this. [*Without letting* HUGHES *see, she gives him packet.*]

[DICKY *opens door, and, looking back at* DAFYDD HUGHES, *bursts defiantly into song.* TWMAS *hurries towards* DICKY, *who breaks off, muttering, "Oh, yes—the ferret!" He goes out, and his song dies away down the road.*

TWMAS. You mustn't mind poor Dicky Bach Dwl.

MARGED. It's only his way, Mr Hughes.

HUGHES. Ah, well, perhaps so! Well, now, to come back to what I was saying. I have come up to-night after consultation with my fellow-deacons.

TWMAS. Yes?

[MARGED *fetches basket of stockings from dresser, and sits left of table.* TWMAS *brings chair from window to back of table.*

HUGHES. I must tell you, Twmas Shôn, that we are all very pleased to observe that you are maintaining your good character. [MARGED *sighs involuntarily.*

TWMAS. Well, I'm doing my best, Mr Hughes. It's true I haven't quite got used to it yet.

HUGHES. No, no! That will come—in time. What you want just now is something to keep your mind occupied. [TWMAS *looks uneasily towards the window.*] "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

MARGED. He doesn't get much of a chance with us women, then, Mr Hughes.

TWMAS. There's a lot of temptations about. I was just dying to go to the living pictures last night, but I thought I'd better not take any risks. You weren't there, I suppose?

HUGHES. Me? No!

TWMAS. I went to bed out of the way.

HUGHES. Yes, we have noticed down in the village that your light goes out much earlier now. Well, as I was saying, you know that Evan Powell is leaving the district?

TWMAS. Yes.

HUGHES. I suggested to my fellow-deacons that we couldn't do better than to give you Powell's place as Assistant Superintendent of the Band of Hope.

TWMAS [*rising, aghast*]. Me, Mr Hughes, me?

MARGED. Mr Hughes bach, Twmas or the Band of Hope, one or the other, would be dead inside a month.

TWMAS. It's a big honour to be asked, and—all that, Mr Hughes; but I couldn't live up to it. Indeed, I couldn't.

MARGED. I ought to know my own husband pretty well by now, and I don't think he'd do for the Band of Hope.

HUGHES. Oh—indeed!

MARGED. If he must do something, he'd be much better keeping the little boys quiet in the gallery on a Sunday night.

TWMAS [*eagerly*]. Yes. That's it—something where I can use my hands a bit.

HUGHES. I may tell you, Twmas Shôn, that, as far as the Band of Hope is concerned, I have made myself personally responsible for you to my fellow-deacons.

TWMAS [*hopelessly*]. It's—it's very kind of you, I'm sure, Mr Hughes.

HUGHES [*decisively*]. Well, then, we may look upon that as settled, then.

TWMAS [*looking out of window*]. To tell you the truth, Mr Hughes, there's something on my mind.

HUGHES. Oh, indeed? P'r'aps I can help you, Twmas Shôn?

TWMAS. It's that rabbit down there in the Big Field.

HUGHES. Rabbit, Twmas Shôn, rabbit?

TWMAS. Yes. Old Soldier as they call him. P'r'aps you've heard about Old Soldier, Mr Hughes?

MARGED [*impatiently*]. Well, if it was the camel coming out of Noah's Ark on his hind-legs there couldn't be more fuss about him.

HUGHES. Old Soldier? That's the rabbit nobody can catch, Twmas Shôn?

TWMAS. They've all failed so far. I failed myself pretty often; but I could catch him now.

HUGHES. Indeed? And how did you discover this great secret, Twmas Shôn?

TWMAS. Well, you know, Mr Hughes, from where I am sitting in Carmel you can see through the windows by the pulpit right up to the Big Field here.

HUGHES. That is true.

TWMAS [*sorrowfully*]. I don't know how it is, but I've never been able to keep my mind fixed on the sermon. Now, there was last Sunday morning. Mr Evans was preaching on Moses viewing the Promised Land. He was

describing it something beautiful, too, was Mr Evans, though, of course, it's only what you'd expect, and him B.A., B.D. But d'you know, Mr Hughes, what I couldn't help seeing in the middle of the Promised Land?

HUGHES. No. Well?

TWMAS. That old rabbit.

HUGHES. What?

TWMAS. Yes, Old Soldier—sitting comfortable on a bit of a hill, with the milk and honey all round him. That's how I was picturing him to myself, with that left ear of his half shot off, and a sort of a smile all over his face.

HUGHES. I always said that window ought to be painted over. It isn't giving the preacher a fair chance.

TWMAS. My good character wouldn't lie half so heavy on me if only I'd put it off till I'd caught Old Soldier down there.

HUGHES. So you think you could catch him now, Twmas Shôn?

TWMAS. Think? I know, Mr Hughes, I know!

HUGHES. And you haven't told anybody?

TWMAS. Not yet. I could tell you, Mr Hughes. It wouldn't be like telling an ordinary man.

HUGHES. Well, if it's weighing so heavy on your mind, Twmas Shôn——

TWMAS [*sitting down*]. It's like this, Mr Hughes. I'll tell you. It's an understood thing in these parts that Old Soldier is only to be tried for with ferret and net.

HUGHES. I see.

TWMAS. Well, they stop up all the holes in the field, yet he always gets away.

HUGHES. Yes. So I've heard.

TWMAS. And d'you know why, Mr Hughes? Stopping up the holes in the field isn't enough.

HUGHES. Not enough?

TWMAS. No. You know that old cave down there in the Cwm?

HUGHES. Yes.

TWMAS. It ends in a little tunnel—doesn't it?—running no one knows where.

HUGHES [*with growing interest*]. Well?

TWMAS. Well, from the lie of the land—you can see it quite plain through the window in Carmel—that tunnel must run somewhere up towards the Big Field.

HUGHES. I see. Well?

TWMAS. You understand what Old Soldier's done, then? He's burrowed through into that tunnel. That's why they're always losing their ferrets.

HUGHES. Yes, no doubt.

TWMAS. And it's no use setting the net in the Big Field at all. It must be set down there in the tunnel.

MARGED [*admiringly*]. You've got a bit of brain after all, Twmas; it's useless denying.

HUGHES. Well, well, well! So that's what was on your mind, Twmas Shôn?

TWMAS. Yes. And an awful strain on me it's been, I can tell you.

[DICKY BACH DWL'S *whistle is heard without. All three start.*

HUGHES [*rising*]. There's that boy again.

TWMAS. He's only bringing the ferret.

[DICKY *is seen hurrying past the window. He bursts in excitedly, crying, "Twmas Shôn! Twmas Shôn!" Seeing* HUGHES, *he pulls up short, but his manner is full of suppressed excitement. In his hand he has a small bag holding the ferret. He goes down and stands near stairs, staring at* HUGHES *in bewilderment.*

HUGHES [*going towards door*]. Well, I think I'll be going.

[*Shaking hands*] Good night, Marged Shôn. Good night, Twmas Shôn. We'll take it as fixed about the Band of Hope.

TWMAS. Thank you for calling, Mr Hughes.

HUGHES [*in doorway*]. The clouds are coming up again, I see. Well, good night, both of you.

[*He goes out. As he passes the window the dog barks, disturbing his dignity.*

MARGED. I'd better get the coal for the morning.

[*She takes candle and goes into kitchen.*

TWMAS [*going towards fireplace*]. You've brought the ferret, then, Dicky?

DICKY [*with excitement*]. Twmas Shôn? [*He puts bag on table.*]

TWMAS. What's the matter?

DICKY. That man in the Big Field last night—he was wearing a cap you said?

TWMAS. Yes.

DICKY. With flaps?

TWMAS. Yes.

DICKY. Like this? [*Taking a cap from his pocket.*]

TWMAS [*eagerly*]. Yes, like that.

DICKY. D'you know who it was?

TWMAS. No, who?

DICKY. Dafydd Hughes the Shop.

TWMAS [*staggered*]. Wha-at?

DICKY. Yes. Twm Tinker saw him.

TWMAS. Saw him?

DICKY. He came home too late for the living pictures. As he was passing the shop he saw Dafydd Hughes slip into his shed very quietly.

TWMAS. Well?

DICKY. Then he came out in a cap and an old coat.

TWMAS. Well?

DICKY. He went up towards the Big Field; but he didn't stay long.

TWMAS. No; I disturbed him.

DICKY. Then he went back and changed again. When Twm told me just now, I went to the shed, and there, sure enough, I found this.

TWMAS. Dafydd Hughes the Shop? Well, I'll be——

DICKY [*puzzled*]. Twmas Shôn, is he—one of us after all?

TWMAS. I wonder!

DICKY [*thoughtfully*]. I think I can forgive him everything if he's after the rabbit, too.

TWMAS. Dicky, d'you know what I've done?

DICKY. What?

TWMAS. I've just told him the way to catch Old Soldier.

DICKY. He mustn't! He shan't! Old Soldier is ours.

TWMAS [*pacing the room*]. I can't stand it, Dicky. Character or no character, I can't stand it!

DICKY [*with guile*]. The ferret is here, Twmas Shôn.

[TWMAS *starts, glancing quickly at* DICKY. *He goes to table and looks at the ferret.*

TWMAS. There's nothing wrong with him. Wants a bit of meat, that's all.

DICKY. And there's Fan on the chain growing savage.

TWMAS. I'll never have rest—not even in the grave—if anyone else gets Old Soldier.

DICKY [*throwing open the door*]. The moon is out on the sea. The clouds are coming up on the wind from Fronole. In a minute or two it will be dark, Twmas Shôn—quite dark.

[*There is a moment's pause, in which a faint sighing of wind is heard, and the rustling of branches in the lane.* TWMAS *is plainly fighting a losing battle with temptation.* DICKY *watches him closely.*

TWMAS. We must have him, Dicky; we must have him —to-night.

DICKY. The net's upstairs, hidden under the potatoes.

TWMAS. I'll get it. [*He goes to the dresser and blows out the light.*] They'll think in the village I've gone to bed. [*He goes out by stairs.*]

[*The room is now lit only by the red glow of the fire. Beyond window and open door the moonlight shines brightly, and a moonbeam falls across the room.*

[DICKY *listens to* TWMAS *going upstairs, and begins to laugh to himself, strangely and eerily. He turns suddenly and darts to the door, where he is seen, clear against the moonlight, talking to the dog as to an understanding friend.*

DICKY. He's come back to us, Fan. We're all together again, us four. [*The dog barks.*] H'sh, Fan, not a word! That's right. Wag your tail. We've won at last. At last! Oh, there's something in me singing so loud! And all the little white stars up there will be laughing, I'm sure, to see us go down the road once more. There'll be fun to-night—such fun! Down through the fields, looking here and there, and the wind from the sea in our faces. Three cheers, Fan! Three cheers, little ferret!

[*He sings a snatch of song, and his feet begin to move in a step-dance to the measure.* TWMAS *comes back with the net. Seeing* DICKY *dancing beyond the door, he pauses a moment, looking on.*

TWMAS. Dicky, come here.

[DICKY *stops at once, and goes slowly towards* TWMAS, *who takes him by the shoulder and swings him into the light of the moonbeam, scanning his face.*

TWMAS. More or less than a man—what are you?

DICKY [*vacantly*]. I'm—Dicky Bach Dwl.

TWMAS [*half awed*]. I don't know. Sometimes I almost

think—— But never mind. [*He goes to kitchen door and opens it.*] Marged, I'm going out—with Dicky. [*Significantly*] You understand?

[DICKY *laughs again, and takes up the ferret, talking to it excitedly under his breath.*

MARGED. Yes. I understand.

[TWMAS *draws curtains over window, goes to door, and is heard unfastening the dog. Chain rattles. Dog barks.* TWMAS *says, "Quiet, Fan!" He looks in and says, "Come on, Dicky!"* DICKY, *carrying ferret, goes out, still laughing to himself. He closes door. Their footsteps die away on the road.*

[*A long pause.*

[MARGED *enters the kitchen with tray, holding lighted candle, loaf, butter, etc. She puts tray on table, and, taking candle, opens door. The moonlight has gone. A moaning of wind is heard. She whispers, "Fan! Fan!" Finding the dog gone, she smiles and sighs with relief. She goes to foot of stairs.*

MARGED [*in a low voice*]. Mary Jane?

MARY JANE. Yes?

MARGED. You're not sleeping?

MARY JANE. No.

MARGED. You remember your father telling you to go down to the butcher in the morning?

MARY JANE. Yes.

MARGED [*with a deal of meaning*]. Well, you needn't go now.

CURTAIN

THE CONSTANT LOVER

A COMEDY OF YOUTH IN ONE ACT

By St John Hankin

CHARACTERS

Evelyn Rivers, *eighteen or twenty*
Cecil Harburton, *twenty-five*

This play was produced on Tuesday, January 30, 1912, at the Royalty Theatre, London, under the direction of Messrs Vedrenne and Eadie, with the following cast:

Evelyn Rivers . . . . Gladys Cooper
Cecil Harburton . . . Dennis Eadie

After leaving Oxford the late St John Hankin became a journalist, and was associated with the *Saturday Review* and the *Times*. His delightfully amusing "Dramatic Sequels" appeared week by week in *Punch*, when the author was thirty-two. His chief plays—"The Two Mr Wetherbys," "The Return of the Prodigal," "The Charity that Began at Home," and "The Cassilis Engagement"—are serious in the sense in which Mr Bernard Shaw's plays are serious: they are founded upon ideas, and the characters and plot are evolved in order to express them.

"The Constant Lover," light as it appears, contains an idea (admittedly heterodox) which is worked out in a vein of elfish irresponsibility.

THE CONSTANT LOVER[1]

Before the curtain rises the orchestra will play the Woodland Music (cuckoo) from "Hansel and Gretel," and possibly some of the Grieg Pastoral Music from "Peer Gynt," or some Gabriel Fauré.

SCENE: *A glade in a wood. About C. a great beech-tree, the branches of which overhang the stage, the brilliant sunlight filtering through them. The sky, where it can be seen through the branches, is a cloudless blue.*

When the curtain rises CECIL HARBURTON *is discovered sitting on the ground under the tree, leaning his back against its trunk and reading a book. He wears a straw hat and the lightest of grey flannel suits. The chattering of innumerable small birds is heard while the curtain is still down, and this grows louder as it rises, and we find ourselves in the wood. Presently a wood-pigeon coos in the distance. Then a thrush begins to sing in the tree above* CECIL'S *head and is answered by another. After a moment* CECIL *looks up.*

CECIL. By Jove, that's jolly! [*Listens for a moment, then returns to his book.*]

[1] Published by Mr Martin Secker, in the collected edition of the author's plays (2 vols., 25*s.* net). Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

[*Suddenly a cuckoo begins to call insistently. After a moment or two he looks up again.*

Cuckoo too! Bravo! [*Again he returns to his book.*]

[*A moment later enter* EVELYN RIVERS *R. She also wears the lightest of summer dresses, as it is a cloudless day in May. On her head is a shady straw hat. As she approaches the tree a twig snaps under her foot and* CECIL *looks up. He jumps to his feet, closing book, and advances to her, eagerly holding out his right hand, keeping the book in his left.*

[*Reproachfully*] Here you are at last!

EVELYN. At last?

CECIL. Yes. You're awfully late! [*Looks at watch.*]

EVELYN. Am I?

CECIL. You know you are. I expected you at three.

EVELYN. Why? I never said I'd come at three. Indeed, I never *said* I'd come at all.

CECIL. No. But it's always been three.

EVELYN. Has it?

CECIL. And now it's half-past. I consider I've been cheated out of a whole half-hour.

EVELYN. I couldn't help it. Mother kept me. She wanted the roses done in the drawing-room.

CECIL. How stupid of Mrs Rivers!

EVELYN. Mr Harburton!

CECIL. What's the matter?

EVELYN. I don't think you *ought* to call my mother stupid.

CECIL. Why not—if she is stupid? Most parents are stupid, by the way. I've noticed it before. Mrs Rivers ought to have thought of the roses earlier. The morning is the proper time to gather roses. Didn't you tell her that?

EVELYN. I'm afraid I couldn't very well. You see, it was

really *I* who ought to have thought of the roses! I always do them. But this morning I forgot.

CECIL. I see. [*Turning towards the tree*] Well, sit down now you *are* here. Isn't it a glorious day?

EVELYN [*hesitating*]. I don't believe I *ought* to sit down.

CECIL [*turns to her*]. Why not? There's no particular virtue about standing, is there? I hate standing. So let's sit down and be comfortable.

[*She sits, so does he. She sits on bank under tree, left of it. He sits below bank to right of tree.*

EVELYN. But *ought* I to be sitting here with you? That's what I mean. It's—not as if I really *knew* you, is it?

CECIL. Not *know* me? [*The chatter of birds dies away.*

EVELYN. Not properly—we've never even been introduced. We just met quite by chance here in the wood.

CECIL. Yes. [*Ecstatically*] What a glorious chance!

EVELYN. Still, I'm sure Mother wouldn't approve.

CECIL. And *you* say Mrs Rivers isn't stupid!

EVELYN [*laughing*]. I expect most people would agree with her. Most people would say you oughtn't to have spoken to a girl you didn't know like that.

CECIL. Oh, come, I only asked my way back to the inn.

EVELYN. There was no harm in asking your way, of course. But then we began talking of other things. And then we sat down under this tree. And we've sat talking under this tree every afternoon since. And that was a week ago.

CECIL. Well, it's such an awfully jolly tree.

EVELYN. I don't know *what* Mother would say if she heard of it.

CECIL. Would it be something unpleasant?

EVELYN [*ruefully*]. I'm afraid it would.

CECIL. How fortunate you don't know it, then.

EVELYN [*pondering*]. Still, if I really *oughtn't* to be here. . . . Do *you* think I oughtn't to be here?

CECIL. I don't think I should go into that if I were you. Sensible people think of what they want to do, not of what they *ought* to do, otherwise they get confused. And then of course they do the wrong thing.

EVELYN. But if I do what I oughtn't, I generally find I'm sorry for it afterwards.

CECIL. Not half so sorry as you would have been if you hadn't done it. In this world the things one regrets are the things one hasn't done. For instance, if I hadn't spoken to you a week ago here in the wood I should have regretted it all my life.

EVELYN. Would you? [*He nods.* Really and truly?

CECIL [*nods*]. Really and truly.

[*He lays his hand on hers for a moment, she lets it rest there. Cuckoo calls loudly once or twice—she draws her hand away.*

EVELYN. There's the cuckoo.

[CECIL *rises and sits up on bank R. of her, leaning against tree.*

CECIL. Yes. Isn't he jolly? Don't you love cuckoos?

EVELYN. They *are* rather nice.

CECIL. Aren't they! And such clever beggars. Most birds are fools—like most people. As soon as they're grown up they go and get married, and then the rest of their lives are spent in bringing up herds of children and wondering how on earth to pay their school-bills. Your cuckoo sees the folly of all that. No school-bills for *her*! No nursing the baby! She just flits from hedgerow to hedgerow flirting with other cuckoos. And when she lays an egg she lays it in some one else's nest, which saves all the trouble of housekeeping. Oh, a wise bird!

EVELYN [*pouting, looking away from him*]. I don't know that I *do* like cuckoos so much after all. They sound to me rather selfish.

CECIL. Yes. But so sensible! The duck's a wise bird too in her way. [*She turns to him.*] But *her* way's different from the cuckoo's. [*Matter-of-fact*] She always *treads* on *her* eggs.

EVELYN. Clumsy creature!

CECIL. Not a bit. She does it on purpose. You see, it's much less trouble than *sitting* on them. As soon as she's laid an egg she raises one foot absent-mindedly and gives a warning quack. Whereupon the farmer rushes up, takes it away, and puts it under some wretched hen, who has to do the sitting for her. I call that genius!

EVELYN. Genius!

CECIL. Yes. Genius is the infinite capacity for making other people take pains.

EVELYN. How can you say that?

CECIL. I didn't. Carlyle did.

EVELYN. I don't believe he said anything of the kind. And I don't believe ducks are clever one bit. They don't look clever.

CECIL. That's part of their cleverness. In this world if one *is* wise one should look like a fool. It puts people off their guard. That's what the duck does.

EVELYN. Well, I think ducks are horrid, and cuckoos too. And I believe most birds *like* bringing up their chickens and feeding them and looking after them.

CECIL. They do. That's the extraordinary part of it. They spend their whole lives building nests and laying eggs and hatching them. And when the chickens come out the father has to fuss round finding worms. And the nest's abominably overcrowded and the babies are perpetually squalling, and that drives the husband to the public-house, and it's all as uncomfortable as the devil——

EVELYN. Mr Harburton!

CECIL. Well, *I* shouldn't like it. In fact, I call it fatuous.

[EVELYN *is leaning forward pondering this philosophy with a slightly puckered brow. A slight pause.*

I say, *you* don't look a bit comfortable like that. Lean back against the tree. It's a first-rate tree. That's why I chose it.

EVELYN [*tries and fails*]. I can't. My hat gets in the way.

CECIL. Take it off, then.

EVELYN. I think I will. [*Does so.*] That's better. [*Leans back luxuriously against the trunk; puts her hat down on bank beside her.*]

CECIL. Much better. [*Looks at her with frank admiration.*] By Jove, you *do* look jolly without your hat!

EVELYN. Do I?

CECIL. Yes. Your hair's such a jolly colour. I noticed it the first time I saw you. You had your hat off then, you know. You were walking through the wood fanning yourself with it. And directly I caught sight of you the sun came out and simply flooded your hair with light. And there was the loveliest pink flush on your cheeks, and your eyes were soft and shining——

EVELYN [*troubled*]. Mr Harburton, you mustn't say things to me like that.

CECIL. Mustn't I? Why not? Don't you like being told you look jolly?

EVELYN [*naïvely*]. I do *like* it, of course. But *ought* you . . .?

CECIL [*groans*]. Oh, it's *that* again.

EVELYN. I mean, it's not *right* for men to say those things to girls.

CECIL. I don't see that—if they're true. You *are* pretty and your eyes *are* soft, and your cheeks—why, they're flush-

ing at this moment! [*Triumphant*] Why shouldn't I say it?

EVELYN. Please! . . . [*She stops, and her eyes fill with tears.*]

CECIL [*much concerned*]. Miss Rivers, what's the matter? Why, I believe you're crying!

EVELYN [*sniffing suspiciously*]. I'm . . . not.

CECIL. You are. I can see the tears. Have I said anything to hurt you? What is it? Tell me. [*Much concerned.*]

EVELYN [*recovering herself by an effort*]. It's nothing. Nothing really. I'm all right now. Only, you won't say things to me like that again, will you? Promise. [*Taking out handkerchief.*]

CECIL. I promise . . . if you really wish it. And now dry your eyes and let's be good children. That's what my nurse used to say when my sister and I quarrelled. Shall I dry them for you? [*Takes her handkerchief and does so tenderly.*]

EVELYN [*with a little gulp*]. Thank you. [*Takes away handkerchief.*] How absurd you are! [*Puts it away.*]

CECIL. Thank *you* !

[EVELYN *moves down, sitting at bottom of bank, a little below him.*

EVELYN. Did you often quarrel with your sister?

CECIL. Perpetually. *And* my brothers. Didn't you?

EVELYN. I never had any.

CECIL. Poor little kid. You must have been rather lonely.

EVELYN [*matter-of-fact*]. There was always Reggie.

CECIL. Reggie?

EVELYN. My cousin, Reggie Townsend. He lived with us when we were children. His parents were in India.

CECIL [*matter-of-fact*]. So he used to quarrel with you instead.

EVELYN [*shocked*]. Oh, no! We *never* quarrelled. At least, Reggie never did. *I* did sometimes.

CECIL. How dull! There's no good in quarrelling if people won't quarrel back.

EVELYN. I don't think there's *any good* in quarrelling at all.

CECIL. Oh, yes, there is. There's the making it up again.

EVELYN. Was that why you used to quarrel with your sister?

CECIL. I expect so, though I didn't know it, of course—then. I used to tease her awfully, I remember, and pull her hair. She had awfully jolly hair. Like yours—oh! I forgot, I mustn't say that. Used you to pull Reggie's hair?

EVELYN [*laughing*]. I'm afraid I did sometimes.

CECIL. I was sure of it. How long was he with you?

EVELYN. Till he went to Winchester. And of course he used to be with us in the holidays after that. And he comes to us now whenever he can get away for a few days. He's in his uncle's office in the city. He'll be a partner some day.

CECIL. Poor chap!

EVELYN. *Poor* chap! Mother says he's very *fortunate*.

CECIL. She would. Parents always think it very fortunate when young men have to go to an office every day. I know mine do.

EVELYN. *Do* you go to an office every day?

CECIL. No.

EVELYN [*with dignity*]. Then I don't think you can know much about it, can you?

CECIL [*carelessly*]. I know too much. That's why I don't go.

EVELYN. What *do* you do?

CECIL. I don't do anything. I'm at the Bar.

EVELYN. If you're at the Bar, why are you down here instead of up in London working?

CECIL. Because if I were in London I might possibly get a brief. It's not likely, but it's possible. And if I got a brief I should have to be mugging in chambers, or wrangling in a stuffy court, instead of sitting under a tree in the shade with you.

EVELYN. But *ought* you to waste your time like that?

CECIL [*genuinely shocked*]. *Waste* my time! To sit under a tree—a really nice tree like this—talking to *you*. You call that *wasting time*!

EVELYN. Isn't it?

CECIL. No! To sit in a frowsy office adding up figures when the sky's blue and the weather's heavenly, *that's* wasting time. The only real way in which one can waste time is not to enjoy it, to spend one's day blinking at a ledger and never notice how beautiful the world is, and how good it is to be alive. To be only making money when one might be making love, *that* is wasting time!

EVELYN. How earnestly you say that!

[CECIL *leans forward—close to her.*

CECIL. Isn't it true?

EVELYN [*troubled*]. Perhaps it is. [*Looks away from him.*]

CECIL. You know it is. Every one knows it. Only, people won't admit it. [*Leaning towards her and looking into her eyes*] You know it at this moment.

EVELYN [*returning his gaze slowly*]. I think I do.

[*For a long moment they look into each other's eyes. Then he takes her two hands, draws her slowly towards him, and kisses her gently on the lips.*

CECIL. Ah! [*Sigh of satisfaction. He releases her hands and leans back against the tree again.*]

EVELYN [*sadly*]. Oh, Mr Harburton, you *oughtn't* to have done that!

CECIL. Why not?

EVELYN. Because . . . [*Hesitates.*] Because you *oughtn't*. . . . Because men *oughtn't* to kiss girls.

CECIL [*scandalized*]. Oughtn't to kiss girls! What nonsense! What on earth were girls made for if not to be kissed?

EVELYN. I mean they *oughtn't* . . . unless . . . [*Looking away.*]

CECIL [*puzzled*]. Unless?

EVELYN [*looking down*]. Unless they *love* them.

CECIL [*relieved*]. But I *do* love you. Of course I love you. That's why I kissed you.

[*A thrush is heard calling in the distance.*

EVELYN. Really? [CECIL *nods.* EVELYN *sighs contentedly.* That makes it all right, then.

CECIL. I should think it did. And as it's all right I may kiss you again, mayn't I?

EVELYN [*shyly*]. If you like.

CECIL. You darling! [*Takes her in his arms and kisses her long and tenderly.*] Lean your head on my shoulder, you'll find it awfully comfortable. [*He leans back against the tree.*] [*She does so.*

There! Is that all right?

EVELYN. Quite. [*Sigh of contentment.*]

CECIL. *How* pretty your hair is! I always thought your hair lovely. And it's as soft as silk. I always knew it would be like silk. [*Strokes it.*] Do you like me to stroke your hair?

EVELYN. Yes!

CECIL. Sensible girl! [*Pause; he laughs happily.*] I say, what am I to call you? Do you know, I don't even know your Christian name yet?

EVELYN. Don't you?

CECIL. No. You've never told me. What is it? Mine's Cecil.

EVELYN. Mine's Evelyn.

CECIL. Evelyn? Oh, I don't like Evelyn. It's rather a *stodgy* sort of name. I think I shall call you Eve. Does anyone else call you Eve?

EVELYN. No.

CECIL. Then I shall certainly call you Eve. After the first woman man ever loved. May I?

EVELYN. If you like—Cecil.

CECIL. That's settled, then.

[*He kisses her again. Pause of utter happiness, during which he settles her head more comfortably on his shoulder, and puts arm round her.*

Isn't it heavenly to be in love?

EVELYN. Heavenly!

CECIL. There's nothing like it in the whole world. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world! Say so.

EVELYN. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world.

CECIL. Good girl! There's a reward for saying it right. [*Kisses her.*] [*Pause of complete happiness for both.*

EVELYN [*meditatively*]. I'm afraid Reggie won't be pleased.

[*The chatter of sparrows is heard.*

CECIL [*indifferently*]. Won't he?

EVELYN [*shakes her head*]. No. You see, Reggie's in love with me too. He always has been in love with me, for years and years. [*Sighs.*] Poor Reggie!

CECIL. On the contrary. Happy Reggie!

EVELYN [*astonished*]. What *do* you mean?

CECIL. To have been in love with you years and years. *I've* only been in love with you a week. . . . I've only known you a week.

EVELYN. I'm afraid Reggie didn't look at it like that.

CECIL [*nods*]. No brains.

EVELYN. You see, I always refused *him.*

CECIL. Exactly. And he always went on loving you. What more could the silly fellow want?

EVELYN [*shyly, looking up at him*]. He *wanted* me to accept him, I suppose. [*The bird chatter dies away.*

CECIL. Ah! . . . Reggie ought to read Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn." . . . I say, what jolly eyes you've got! I noticed them the moment we met here in the wood. That was why I spoke to you.

EVELYN [*demurely*]. I thought it was to ask your way back to the inn.

CECIL. That was an excuse. I knew the way as well as you did. I'd only just come from there. But when I saw you with the sunshine on your pretty soft hair and lighting up your pretty soft eyes, I said I *must* speak to her. And I did. Are you glad I spoke to you?

EVELYN. Yes.

CECIL. Glad and glad?

EVELYN. Yes.

CECIL. Good girl! [*Leans over and kisses her cheek.*]

EVELYN [*sigh of contentment; sits up*]. And now we must go and tell Mother.

CECIL [*with a comic groan*]. Need we?

EVELYN [*brightly*]. Of course.

CECIL [*sigh*]. Well, if *you* think so.

EVELYN [*laughing*]. You don't seem to look forward to it much.

CECIL. I don't. That's the part I always hate.

EVELYN. *Always?* [*Starts forward and looks at him puzzled.*]

CECIL [*quite unconscious*]. Yes. The going to the parents and all that. Parents really are the most preposterous people. They've no feeling for *romance* whatever. You meet a girl in a wood. It's May. The sun's shining. There's not a cloud in the sky. She's adorably pretty.

You fall in love. Everything heavenly! Then—why, I can't imagine—she wants you to tell her mother. Well, you do tell her mother. And her mother at once begins to ask you what your profession is, and how much money you earn, and how much money you have that you don't earn—and that spoils it all.

EVELYN [*bewildered*]. But I don't understand. You talk as if you had actually done all this before.

CECIL. So I have. Lots of times.

EVELYN. Oh! [*Jumps up from ground and faces him, her eyes flashing with rage.*]

CECIL. I say, don't get up. It's not time to go yet. It's only four. Sit down again.

EVELYN [*struggling for words*]. Do you mean to say you've been in love with girls before? *Other* girls?

CECIL [*apparently genuinely astonished at the question*]. Of course I have.

EVELYN. And been engaged to them?

CECIL. Not engaged. I've never been engaged so far. But I've been in love over and over again.

[EVELYN *stamps her foot with rage—turning away from him.*

My dear girl, what *is* the matter? You look quite cross. [*Rises.*]

EVELYN [*furious*]. And you're not even *ashamed* of it?

CECIL [*roused to sit up by this question*]. Ashamed of it? Ashamed of being in love? How can you say such a thing! Of course I'm not ashamed. What's the good of being alive at all if one isn't to be in love? I'm perpetually in love. In fact, I'm hardly ever out of love—with somebody.

EVELYN [*still furious*]. Then if you're in love, why don't you get engaged? A man has no business to make love to a girl and not be engaged to her. It's not right.

CECIL [*reasoning with her*]. That's the parents' fault. I told you parents were preposterous people. They won't allow me to get engaged.

EVELYN. Why not?

CECIL. Oh, for different reasons. They say I'm not *serious* enough. Or that I don't work enough. Or that I haven't got enough money. Or else they simply say they "don't think I'm fitted to make their daughter happy." Anyhow, they won't sanction an engagement. They all agree about *that*. Your mother would be just the same. [*Impatient exclamation from* EVELYN.] I don't blame her. I don't say she's not right. I don't say they haven't all been right. In fact, I believe they *have* been right. I'm only explaining how it is.

EVELYN [*savagely*]. *I* see how it is. You don't really want to be married.

CECIL. Of course I don't *want* to be married. Nobody does unless he's perfectly idiotic. One wants to be in love. Being in love's splendid. And I dare say being engaged isn't bad—though I've had no experience of that so far. But being married must be simply hateful.

EVELYN [*boiling with rage*]. Nonsense! How can it be hateful to be married if it's splendid to be in love?

[*The cuckoo is heard.*

CECIL. Have you forgotten the cuckoo?

EVELYN. Oh!!!

CECIL. No ties, no responsibilities, no ghastly little villa with children bellowing in the nursery. Just life in the open hedgerow. Life and love. Happy cuckoo!

EVELYN [*furious*]. I think cuckoos detestable. They're mean, horrid, *disgusting* birds.

CECIL. No. No. I can't have you abusing cuckoos. They're particular friends of mine. In fact, I'm a sort of cuckoo myself.

EVELYN [*turning on him*]. Oh, I hate you! I hate you! [*Stamps her foot.*]

CECIL [*with quiet conviction*]. You don't.

EVELYN. I do!

CECIL [*shaking his head*]. You don't. [*Quite gravely*] One never really hates the people one has once loved.

[*He looks into her eyes. For a moment or two she returns his gaze fiercely. Then her eyes fall and they fill with tears.*

EVELYN [*half crying*]. How horrid you are to say that!

CECIL. Why?

EVELYN. Because it's true, I suppose. Oh, I'm so unhappy! [*Begins to cry.*]

CECIL [*genuinely distressed*]. Eve! You're crying. You mustn't do that. I can't bear seeing people cry. [*Lays hand on her shoulder.*]

EVELYN [*shaking it off*]. Don't. I can't bear you to touch me. After falling in love with one girl after another like that. When I thought you were only in love with me.

CECIL. So I am only in love with you—now.

EVELYN [*tearfully*]. But I thought you'd never been in love with anyone else. And I let you call me Eve because you said she was the first woman man ever loved.

CECIL. But I never said she was the only one, did I? [*Argumentatively*] And one can't *help* being in love with people when one *is* in love, can one? I couldn't *help* falling in love with you, for instance, the moment I saw you. You looked simply splendid. It was such a splendid day, too. *Of course* I fell in love with you.

EVELYN [*slightly appeased by his compliment, drying her eyes*]. But you seem to fall in love with such a lot of people.

CECIL. I do. [*Mischievously*] But ought *you* to throw

stones at me? After all, being in love with more than one person is no worse than having more than one person in love with you. How about Reggie?

EVELYN. Reggie? [*The sparrows' chatter starts again.*

CECIL [*nods*]. Reggie's in love with you, isn't he? So am I. And both at once too! I'm only in love with one person at a time.

EVELYN [*rebelliously*]. I can't help Reggie being in love with me.

CECIL. And I can't help *my* being in love with you. That's just my point. I knew you'd see it.

EVELYN. I don't see it at all. Reggie is quite different from you. Reggie's love is true and constant. . . .

CECIL. Well, I'm a *constant* lover if you come to that.

EVELYN. You aren't. You know you aren't.

CECIL. Yes, I am. A constant lover is a lover who is constantly in love.

EVELYN. Only with the same person.

CECIL. It doesn't say so. It only says constant.

EVELYN [*half laughing*]. How ridiculous you are!

[*Turns away.*

CECIL [*sigh of relief*]. That's right. Now you're good-tempered again.

EVELYN. I'm not.

CECIL. What a story!

EVELYN. I'm not. I'm very, *very* angry.

CECIL. That's impossible. You can't possibly be angry and laugh at the same time, can you? No one can. And you *did* laugh. You're doing it now.

[*She does so unwillingly.*

So don't let's quarrel any more. It's absurd to quarrel on such a fine day, isn't it? Let's make it up, and be lovers again.

[*The sparrows die away.*

EVELYN [*shaking her head*]. No.

CECIL. Please!

EVELYN [*shaking her head*]. No.

CECIL. Well, you're very foolish. Love isn't a thing to throw away. It's too precious for that. Love is the most beautiful thing in the whole world. You said so yourself not ten minutes ago.

EVELYN. I didn't. You said it. [*Looking down.*]

CECIL. But you said it after me. [*Gently and gravely*] Eve, dear, don't be silly. Let's be in love while we can. Youth is the time to be in love, isn't it? Soon you and I will be dull and stupid and middle-aged like all the other tedious people. And then it will be too late. Youth passes so quickly. Don't let's waste a second of it. They say the May-fly only lives for one day. He is born in the morning. All the afternoon he flutters over the river in the sunshine, dodging the trout and flirting with other May-flies. And at evening he dies. Think of the poor May-fly who happens to be born on a wet day! The tragedy of it!

EVELYN [*softly*]. Poor May-fly.

CECIL. There! You're sorry for the May-fly, you see. You're only angry with me.

EVELYN. Because you're not a May-fly.

CECIL. Yes, I am. A sort of May-fly.

EVELYN [*with suspicion of tears in her voice*]. You aren't. How can you be? Besides, you said you were a cuckoo just now.

CECIL. I suppose I'm a cuckoo-May-fly. For I *hate* wet days. And if you're going to cry again, it might just as well be wet, mightn't it? So do dry your eyes like a good girl. Let me do it for you. [*Does it with her handkerchief.*] [*She laughs ruefully.*

There, that's better. And now we're going to be good children again, aren't we?

EVELYN [*giving in*]. Yes.

CECIL [*holding out hand*]. And you'll kiss and be friends?

EVELYN. I'll be friends, of course. [*Sadly*] But you must never kiss me again.

CECIL. What a shame! Why not?

EVELYN. Because you mustn't.

CECIL [*cheerfully*]. Well, you'll sit down again anyhow, won't you? Just to show we've made it up. [*Moves towards tree.*]

EVELYN [*shakes head*]. No.

CECIL [*disappointed ; turns*]. Ah. . . . Then you haven't really made it up.

EVELYN. Yes, I have. [*Picks up her hat.*] But I must go now. Reggie's coming down by the five o'clock train, and I want to be at the station to meet him. [*Holds out hand.*] Good-bye, Mr Harburton.

CECIL [*taking hand*]. Eve! You're going to accept Reggie! [*Pause.*]

EVELYN [*half to herself*]. I wonder.

CECIL. And *he'll* have to tell your mother?

EVELYN. Of course.

CECIL [*drops her hand*]. Poor Reggie! So *his* romance ends too!

EVELYN. It won't. If I marry Reggie I shall make him very happy.

CECIL. Very likely. Marriage may be happiness, but I'm hanged if it's romance!

EVELYN. Oh! [*Exclamation of impatience.*]

[*She turns away and exits R.*

[CECIL *watches her departure with a smile, half amused, half pained, till she is long out of sight. Then with half a sigh turns back to his tree.*

CECIL [*reseating himself*]. Poor Reggie! [*Reopens his book and settles himself to read again.*]

[*A cuckoo hoots loudly from a distant thicket, and is answered by another.* CECIL *looks up from his book to listen as the curtain falls.*

CURTAIN